

Keeping apprentices on the tools



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and passion of AMWU
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our union's history of
organising for power
and influence is
built upon."**



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Editorial

The central role of our elected workplace delegates is one of the things that sets the AMWU apart from the rest of the trade union movement.

I've seen first hand over decades the strategic thinking, commitment and sacrifice our delegates make to deliver for our members and their communities.

I started my time in our union as a delegate and HSR at Tubemakers in Newcastle, NSW. I learnt from the more seasoned AMWU delegates in my workplace how to use our collective strength to not only defend what we had, but win new rights and conditions.

I know how challenging being an elected workplace leader can be at times, balancing not only your personal and family commitments, with your paid work plus the work you do representing members.

I also know, though, how rewarding it can be when you're part of a win for members, or when you watch a worker build their confidence.

There's a great quote from an old ACTU study about union delegates' roles – and I thought of so many of our delegates when I read it:

“Members look to delegates in the workplaces to act as leaders, with a plan to improve the situation at work, to show that the world can be different and to be prepared to be the one who will stand up to management on issues”.

As a National Union, we are refocussing our efforts to emphasise the role of elected workplace leaders.

I have made it a priority of my work as the new National Secretary to shape, develop and support delegates' roles internally.

I also believe there is so much untapped potential amongst our membership. I know from my own experience on the tools that there are a big number of members who are seen as leaders in the workplace, who have yet to take up the request of fellow workers to represent them as a leader.

To those members, who've thought about it every now and again, or who have been urged to step up by their fellow members – there's two things I want you to know.

Firstly, making the decision to become an AMWU delegate is one you won't regret. The knowledge, solidarity and opportunities that come through being active in your union are unrivalled.

Secondly, you will have the full force of the AMWU behind you whenever you take up a new challenge – it is our priority to give delegates and workplace leaders every single resource they need to win for members.

Steve Murphy,
AMWU National Secretary



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AMWU News Autumn 2021

The AMWU News is authorised by the National Secretary of the AMWU, Steve Murphy.

National Conference 2021 - Tuesday, 26 October - Thursday, 28 October

The Conference is the supreme governing body of the union. The meeting of the union's elected conference delegates will set the direction of the Union for the next two years and decide on our priority political and industrial campaigns. Agenda items for the National Conference should be marked 'National Conference' and sent to the National Secretary, AMWU, PO Box 160, Granville NSW 2142. Submissions must be received by close of business on 13 September.

State Conferences

NSW Thurs 12 – Fri 13 August
Closing date for Agenda Items: Wed 30 June

VIC Wed 28 – Thurs 29 July
Closing date for Agenda Items: Tue 15 June

QLD Thurs 26 – Friday 27 August
Closing date for Agenda Items: Wed 14 July

SA Mon 16 – Tue 17 August
Closing date for Agenda Items: Fri 2 July

WA Tue 17 – Wed 18 August
Closing date for Agenda Items: Mon 5 July

TAS Wed 11 – Thurs 12 August
Closing date for Agenda Items: Mon 28 June

Keeping apprentices on the tools

AMWU apprentices from all over the country led a campaign to keep on-the-job training part of our trades and demonstrated the power of collective action.

Late last year the national authority responsible for overseeing our training standards proposed to remove 'workplace practice' from doing an apprenticeship.

The proposal was met with outrage from apprentices and qualified tradespeople, who called for a union meeting to build a member-led campaign to protect the high quality of our trades - and we only had four weeks to win it.

The AMWU became aware of an Australian Industry Skills Committee (AISC) plan to abandon the requirement that apprentices complete a set number of hours in the workplace practicing their skills before they become trade-qualified.

We also learnt that some private training organisations were wanting to be able to provide trade credentials to international students without offering them the security and protections of an apprenticeship.

"We're working with gases and hazardous substances, we're working the cranes and an overhead monorail.

This is something you can simply not learn at TAFE, you need to be on site," said third-year apprentice fitter and turner, Isabelle Booth.

Isabelle was one of five AMWU apprentices who travelled to Parliament House, Canberra, with National Secretary, Steve Murphy and National President, Andrew Dettmerto convince politicians to reverse this controversial plan.

"We had a lot of meetings," says Isabelle, "and I got to voice our concerns directly to decision makers in Parliament House. That is pretty powerful."

Federal Employment Minister, Michaelia Cash, who is the minister in charge of skills and training, was top of our list of targets.

"When us apprentices visited Michaelia Cash's office, she didn't even show up to listen to us," says Isabelle.

The AMWU campaign was building support and would now become a bigger issue with State Governments and our local manufacturing industry.

"We knew we had to defend our trade qualifications, which are renowned around the world," says AMWU Skills Coordinator,

Ian Curry, who is also the elected chair of our Union's Manufacturing and Engineering Industry Reference Committee

"Employers and unions agreed to a standard which included practical elements - and the bureaucrats said 'no'. We wanted a proper standard for Australian trades, not a revenue stream for private training providers," continues Ian. "You don't learn to weld up a submarine hull or a wind turbine tower in a classroom - you learn it in a workplace and you can't separate the practice from the theory."

Isabelle, who works at Temco - an electro metallurgical smelter in Northern Tasmania - was elected by AMWU apprentices to help lead the campaign.

"My site organiser, Jacob, told me we had to move quickly before the politicians messed this decision up, so I went around work collecting petitions. Then I went to Canberra... I got involved because the proposal was stupid. There would be a complete loss of confidence in the Engineering trades... I love being on the job with lots of tradies around, you learn so much from them and I always ask heaps of questions."



AMWU apprentices Isabelle, John, Eddie, and Anthony met with politicians to tell them to keep apprentices on the tools.

Fourth-year fitter and turner Eddie Stanton-Cooke, who works at Balmain Shipyard, was passionate about apprentices standing up to lead the campaign.

“The yard is great, there’s lots of knowledge and experience, we have a diverse range of trades and every day I learn something new,” says Eddie.

Eddie developed an interest in the maritime industry after sailing around the world when he left high school.

“I wanted to play a big role in the campaign because I thought they were wrong, and it was an attack on our trades... These people making these decisions really have no idea about what’s involved in completing an apprenticeship.”

Apprentices also had the challenge of organising in the middle of the pandemic.

“As part of the campaign we had a number of zoom meetings with up to 40 members over the month, it was great to talk to other apprentices about workplace issues and such,” Eddie says.

Third-year metal fabrication apprentice John Vo also works in the maritime industry at International Catamarans in Tasmania.

“I believe the hands-on training I have had the opportunity to undergo throughout my apprenticeship is crucial to my professional growth and has contributed to the great quality of my apprenticeship,” says John.

“I have known people to move away from their friends and families to receive quality training in other states, I have been lucky enough to receive fantastic training in Hobart and I wish for future apprentices to have the same opportunity as I have had... By receiving hands-on training opportunities, I can learn effective, relevant skills and apply them quickly to industry-relevant hurdles.”

The campaign that was developed by apprentice members, with the support of the AMWU nationally, convinced the trades training ministers from State and Territory Governments to block the proposal and agree that apprenticeships must involve on-the-job training.

Speaking about the campaign, National Secretary Steve Murphy said: “Every AMWU member should be proud of this outcome.

The professionalism and passion of AMWU apprentices involved in our campaign, is what our union’s history of organising for power and influence is built upon.

“This campaign has reinforced that getting organised around an injustice that we see, sharing the problem and building support and power can win for even the most vulnerable in our industries. We defended the institution that gives young working class people a go.

“Apprenticeships are how working class people pass on the skills and knowledge of our crafts to the next generation of workers.

We have seen decades of our TAFE system being dismantled and underfunded, with young workers struggling to finish their apprenticeships. We’re going to build on the back of this win to help rebuild our TAFE system too.

“It is core union business to defend the apprenticeship system that belongs to our union, and that has given generations of working class people a starting point for a better life.

“We kept apprentices on the tools” . ●

AMWU delegates

We are determined to put our workplace leaders at the centre of our union's structures, campaigns and planning.

Since our first meeting in October 2020, members of the AMWU Manufacturing Campaign Committee (MCC) have been working hard to develop an AMWU campaign plan.

Our 12 rank and file delegates, elected from each of our National Industry Committees, Women's Committee, OH&S Committee, and our Training and Skills Committee, are leading the union's work on our manufacturing campaign strategy and policy asks.

Supported by the AMWU nationally, we are ready to roll out our campaign plan to AMWU workplaces to build support and activism.

Meet the delegates and check out what they had to say about our campaign.

Michelle Owen, McCain, Ballarat



Michelle Owen is keen to reinvigorate a national conversation on how much we used to manufacture

versus how much we manufacture now.

"It's really about promoting the conversation about keeping manufacturing in Australia."

"For me it's really about bringing the conversation back to the dinner table – to promote the conversation about keeping manufacturing in Australia," she says.

Michelle has been a machine operator at McCain foods in Ballarat for 20 years and has seen the real threat of products being made overseas.

She works on the dinner line and says products like chicken have been shipped to New Zealand to be made there because they were cheaper, but they were eventually brought back.

"Every year we hear that some of our products will be shipped off and made overseas, it's a reality.

"There's a lot of competition, things can be made cheaper elsewhere."

This has fuelled Michelle's passion for an AMWU member led manufacturing campaign, saying that just because it's cheaper to make overseas doesn't mean we should make it overseas when the quality suffers.

An AMWU delegate and HSR, Michelle says Australian manufacturing is the key to maintaining our economy.

"I'm proud to be able to campaign on behalf of our nation and all its people," she adds.

Jessica Rea, Simplot Kelso, Bathurst



Living in a small town means the closure of any factory or business sends shockwaves through the community

- everyone is impacted, says Jessica Rea.

She's been working at Simplot Kelso, a company making fish portions, for 10 years.

She says she's seen the direct impact of manufacturing being sent offshore as she's watched the company send a

lot of their contracts overseas.

"Exploiting workers overseas in places like Thailand, or South Africa messes with my values, it's a conflict for me - we need customers to demand Australian made."

There are two Simplot sites near Jessica, in both Kelso and Bathurst.

"The Bathurst site went down to a skeleton crew at one stage where they had massive redundancies and for my town where there's only 40,000 people it was a lot of jobs to lose.

"It was around 100 jobs lost, when you have that many jobs lost in a small town it sends a ripple effect through the wider community," she says.

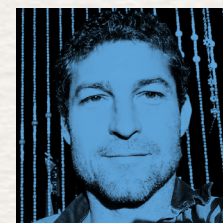
The town is still reeling from the loss of an Electrolux manufacturing factory.

Jessica decided to play a bigger role in our manufacturing campaign because she wants to take what she learns on a national level back to her work site.

"My goal is to set up a district committee in Bathurst and give the people in my town the tools to use to hold companies and local government accountable.

"I need this community to feel like they have the skills to fight," she adds.

Michael West, Brisbane Bus Build, Brisbane



Michael West is an auto electrician who has been working in the vehicle building industry in Brisbane for 22 years.

He has spent the last 11 years working at a local bus manufacturing company.

He says he's living with the constant uncertainty of redundancies and insecure work because local manufacturing is being cut.

take the lead

"There used to be a healthy industry of bus manufacturers here in Brisbane. Now there is only a few factories left."

He adds that the company he works for started out with a ten-year contract that was reduced to two years and then went down to the current one-year contract that is nearly finished.

"With COVID-19 hitting, their budgets for bus building have been cut."

"It doesn't make sense to me when we're told we can't manufacture here or that our products aren't competitive."

Michael says this is particularly unsettling for some of the older workers who've done this work their whole lives, since their apprenticeships.

"If they're made redundant now, there will be nowhere else for them to go," he adds.

With bus contracts drying up and imported buses continuing to gain a foot-hold in the Australian bus market, Aussie manufacturing workers are facing tough times.

Local and state governments as well as private bus companies are increasingly looking to buy cheaper overseas-built buses.

But that comes at a different cost - buses like the ones Michael builds are built to last up to 20 years.

He describes his work as a full production line.

"At the start of the assembly line, they roll in as an engine and a steering wheel on a chassis rail, with no body.

As an auto electrician Michael installs all the electrics from the lights and radio to the engine and dashboard wiring.

His mission is to fight to save Australian manufacturing and to have strong local procurement rules.

Ray Wynne, Opal Revesby, Sydney



Ray Wynne's workplace is seen as an industry leader across manufacturing.

"When I speak with other AMWU

organisers they always use our sites as the benchmark to bring other sites up to."

He's worked tirelessly with the members on site to fight to keep pay and conditions at Opal Packaging.

Ray has worked as a machine operator for 13 years. For nine of those years he's been a delegate and is now head delegate.

He's seen in his work life how manufacturing can thrive.

When COVID-19 first hit, the workload at Opal rocketed, as workers like Ray scrambled to supply packaging to Coles, Woolworths and other companies as people started to panic buy during the pandemic.

While workers across Australia were losing their jobs, or being stood down, Ray and his colleagues were called on to do extra overtime to keep up with the extra demand, as fear around the pandemic grew.

As the COVID-19 lockdowns eased, the workload dropped back again.

He's also seen his company being bought and sold by Australian owners. It's now owned by a Japanese based company.

"Too often we see our Australian companies being sold to the highest

foreign spender which leaves little for our future."

Ray has been actively involved in negotiations nationally as delegates across the company come together to bargain for their wages and conditions.

His site has 100 per cent membership and monthly union meetings are built into their employment agreement.

Ray has two young kids who he says motivates his involvement in the manufacturing campaign to secure their future.

"We make our campaign relevant by making it relatable and where I work, talking about the future of our kids works."

He also doesn't buy it when we're told that we can't manufacture things at home.

"It's simple, it's really important for us to be able to make our own stuff.

"It doesn't make sense to me when we're told we can't manufacture here or that our products aren't competitive."

Keith Lang, Sydney Trains, Sydney



"I want to see a vibrant manufacturing industry in Australia - one that has strong, safe, secure and highly

skilled jobs for my kids."

As a father of three kids under five, Keith Lang is driven to make this a reality through the manufacturing campaign committee (MCC).

"It's about thinking about future generations.

"Bosses aren't going to give us what we want because we ask nicely and the government needs to understand how vital and vibrant manufacturing is," he says.

Keith has worked as a heavy plant technician maintaining Sydney Trains' heavy plant fleet for 18 years.

He's been an AMWU member since he started his apprenticeship in an industry he says has always been heavily unionised.

"It was drilled into me early in the piece that your working conditions and wages have not been handed to us, but hard fought and won."

In his view, those wins have been around safety and a move from being a male-dominated workplace to having more women on site.

"We've got far more female apprentices today but we've still got work to do to improve equality."

Keeping apprentices on the tools is a major driver for him alongside the fight for local procurement.

"Local procurement is abysmal. Governments just don't appreciate the manufacturing industry's capabilities and more and more aren't looking to design, build and maintain here."

Keith is talking about building ferries, buses and trains in NSW.

"We're fully capable of producing locally," he adds.

Hilton Gumbys, BAE Systems, Adelaide



Hilton has worked in defence manufacturing for over 30 years since being an apprentice.

He works as a fitter machinist and assembling components for programmes such as the F35 Joint Strike Fighter and the Evolved Sea Sparrow Missiles. It's the Nulka Active Missile Decoy, he says he's most proud of.

Has been a delegate for 10 years and convenes the AMWU's Defence and Aerospace Committee.

He cut his teeth on community campaigning through the Change the Rules campaign during the Federal election and he has been to Canberra as a delegate, highlighting issues facing workers in the defence and aerospace industries.

Hilton has negotiated three EBAs as a delegate.

Now he's bringing his workplace and community campaigning experience to the AMWU manufacturing campaign.

**Keith is talking
about building
ferries, buses
and trains in NSW.
"We're fully capable
of producing
locally."**

"Now is the time to get that message out because COVID-19 has exposed the weakness in our supply chains.

"We're beholden to fickle and fragile supply chains from around the world."

As part of the campaign Hilton wants to ensure that Australia grows our defence capability and does not buy things offshore.

"We've seen a lot of that knee jerk reaction, the real threat is looking elsewhere rather than building our own capability here," says Hilton.

He describes this as short sighted.

Jon Primrose, BAE Systems, Perth



Jon Primrose is working on upgrades to Australia's Anzac class frigates. He says work on each ship

takes up to a year-and-a-half.

He's been a pipefitter in the shipbuilding industry for nine years.

"Over the period of COVID-19 we've picked up a lot of work. Since the pandemic started I've only just had my first day off a week ago.

"We've worked through the whole time, the yard shut for one day in 2020."

Getting involved in the manufacturing campaign was a natural progression for Jon who has been a delegate for over 8 years.

"I'm very passionate about making sure manufacturing does stay in Australia.

"From a consumer point of view, I am also sick and tired of not being able to buy anything in Australia," he says.

At the shipyard where he works he's seen several rounds of redundancies, but things have picked up again with new contracts.

He is also currently in EBA negotiations and he is hoping that the new contracts will result in a positive outcome for members.

"It's one of the best times we've had to negotiate."

His priorities on the campaign are getting the government to change local procurement rules.

He's keen for other AMWU members to get involved because it's about creating secure jobs with fair pay.

Pepe Jones, Darrell Lea, Sydney



Pepe Jones has worked for Darrell Lea confectionery in Ingleburn for 7 years as a machine operator.

She has a nine year old son so she says she works her shift earlier in the day to make sure she can pick her son up from school.

Pepe is a delegate and a health and safety representative at Darrell Lea and said workplace injuries had been becoming more and more frequent.

"We've been getting at least one lost-time injury a month, it's no good.

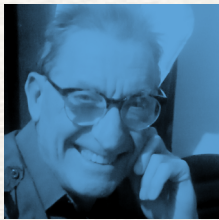
"It's always been an uphill battle to get the bosses to hurry up and make the place safer to work - it's always been a struggle," says Pepe.

She got involved in the manufacturing campaign because she thinks it's time for some fresh ideas and to try new strategies.

Pepe says her main goal is to raise awareness of the importance of manufacturing and to leave politicians no choice but to value the industry.

**"Bosses aren't going
to give us what we
want because we
ask nicely and the
government needs
to understand how
vital and vibrant
manufacturing is."**

**Paul Gunner,
Retired technician,
Houghton, SA**



Paul Gunner has a wealth of knowledge and work experience in manufacturing to bring to the campaign.

Campaigning flows in his veins. He says he tried to retire but it didn't last long.

Paul did his apprenticeship in 1974 qualifying as a motor mechanic working at a Holden dealer in Adelaide.

He worked for the Royal Automobile Association (RAA) for 32 years and was a senior delegate.

Paul is focused on ensuring that skills and training are a central part of the manufacturing campaign.

"There's no doubt that we need to rebuild manufacturing in Australia.

"The only way we're going to do that is by ensuring that we've got a highly skilled workforce."

He says this will only happen if the government invests in skill development.

"We've got a great country but it's not just a resource base," he says.

He believes we need to ensure we have industry policy in each state and territory.

"Manufacturing drives a lot of the national income, national change and national productivity.

"But workers and skills need to be at the centre of that,"

With the achievement of the national skills and training agenda, a lot has been done, but Paul says there's more to do to protect apprenticeships, skills, training and workforce development.

Paul is also passionate about changing how we look at manufacturing in Australia.

"We can't just be a mining resource. This is not what people want. People need and want good secure work in a sustainable manufacturing industry. Australia's future depends on it."

**Cameron Brady,
NewsCorp, Geelong**



Cameron Brady doesn't have to look much further than his own worksite to see the need to fight to save manufacturing.

He has worked as a printing machinist for the Herald Sun in Westgate for 18 years.

NewsCorp is about to move sites, which means up to half of the workers on site could lose their jobs.

"When you're facing a redundancy, the reality of the fight to save manufacturing becomes real,"

"Morale is at an all time low - you can see it in the faces of my workmates on the floor - they're worried," adds Cameron.

Ensuring as many permanent jobs are secured on the new site is a fight Cameron is leading as a delegate.

Just as he was being interviewed by AMWU News he says he's been able to save one more job.

The increased use of labour hire companies across the printing industry concerns Cameron and he wants the manufacturing campaign to address this.

"Most of the money goes back to the labour hire company and workers aren't making that much out of it.

"It would be a tough gig, there's no wonder some of these workers have to work multiple jobs."

**Dominic Vignale,
Komatsu Mining Corp,
Rockhampton**

Dominic Vignale has been working at Komatsu for 22 years as a leading hand on the development of machinery.

Komatsu manufactures and services heavy equipment that is used in the extraction and haulage of coal and minerals in both underground and surface mining.

Dominic started his working life as an apprentice boilermaker and he now works sourcing drawings and working out problems when it comes to developing machinery for the company.

He started working at Komatsu because he wanted to "get out of the casual trap and into a permanent role".

Dominic hopes to keep up the fight to keep manufacturing at home, while also ensuring any jobs created are secure and fairly paid.

"COVID-19 really highlighted the dramas we have here. There was a reduction in business and issues in our supply chain - we struggled to get materials from England and South Africa," he adds.

"The message of our campaign is pretty clear - make it here and your job doesn't disappear."

"Manufacturing drives a lot of the national income, national change and national productivity. But workers and skills need to be at the centre of that."

**James Belsher,
UGL, UGL Bassendean**



James Belsher is a mechanic and fitter by trade and has worked in rail maintenance and rebuilding for most of his career.

James does maintenance and component rebuilds on trains, particularly in heavy haulage.

"I come from an extensive background within engineering, the mechanical trades, specialised mine fields - so I've worked in construction, maintenance, to oil and gas and a number of other industries.

The manufacturing campaign is crucial, says James because he's seen manufacturing diminish across multiple industries.

"At the site where I work now, 20 years ago when I first worked there, it was a massive workshop where they actually built things, whereas now it's more of a service base."

James has four children and like other MCC delegates believes the campaign is key to their future. ●

Keep Australian shipbuilding alive

Right now, the Tasmanian State Government is considering whether or not to build a third 'Spirit of Tasmania' ferry, specifically for freight, including cars and caravans. AMWU members at Hobart shipbuilding company, INCAT, are united and determined in their campaign to get the State Government to commit to building the third ferry, and building it in Tasmania to support local jobs.

INCAT builds world-class ferries that are exported all over the world, but the prestigious company is at risk of becoming another COVID-19 casualty, with global orders for ferries on hold for at least two more years.

AMWU delegate Denis Webber, who has worked at INCAT since it opened, is worried about what the future will hold for the company if the State Government doesn't commit to building a third ferry locally.

"We were doing really well until COVID-19 hit, we had at least eight or nine years of orders. But it all stopped with travel grinding to a halt and we've only got enough work to last around seven more months", Denis said.

The government has already committed to building two additional passenger ferries but the AMWU is pushing hard for a third freight ferry to be added to the fleet. The union says that the much-needed freight service would cut the journey time to and from the mainland by at least five hours and have the ability to carry cars and caravans, supporting Tasmania's vital tourism industry, as well as keeping highly-skilled shipbuilders at work.

Denis says that INCAT turns out the best-made catamarans in the world and it is high time that the Tasmanian Government recognised and utilised their skills.



L to R - AMWU Tasmania State Secretary John Short with INCAT workers Denis Webber, Jason Hutton and John Vo.

"Our catamarans are used by ferry services the world over. We have five sheds here that could very easily be used to build the Bass Strait's third ferry and could start tomorrow.

"If we got this contract, it would mean that we wouldn't have to lay off any workers and we could ride through the pandemic until the order books started to pick up again."

INCAT employs around 500 people and supports many hundreds of other jobs through the region. AMWU members are hopeful that the construction of a new Bass Strait ferry could lead to up to 300 extra workers being employed.

"If we don't get this contract, I worry about the future. We will lose many highly skilled people. This would be a huge blow to the people of Hobart and the businesses that rely on us. But the people I most worry about are our apprentices, we need young people on board to learn the skills and to work up."

Apprentice John Vo, who started working at INCAT in 2018, said he and many of his workmates were waiting nervously for the decision. "Everyone here is very worried but we are hopeful that the taskforce will make a decision in our favour.

"In Tasmania it's really hard to get a job straight out of school so I feel incredibly proud to work at INCAT.

It has meant I have been able to stay here rather than head to the mainland to get work, and I have been able to learn many skills that I can use across many different industries. It is giving me an opportunity to broaden my horizon and I want other young people to be able to do the same."

AMWU member Jason Hutton added: "This is not just about the 550 people on the shop floor, it's all the suppliers that rely on INCAT. If we are quiet it will affect thousands - from the engineering firms to the people who produce nuts and bolts.

"If we don't get this contract, I worry about the future. We will lose many highly skilled people."

"The Bass Strait is one of our national highways and it makes sense for it to get an upgrade when governments around the country are tipping billions into infrastructure.

AMWU Tasmanian Branch Secretary John Short added: "Building another vessel in Tasmania will lead to a skills and productivity boost that the state needs, creating hundreds of local jobs. While the State Government has introduced free travel for passenger ferries across the Bass Strait, we need more from them.

"Tasmanian workers are skilled and capable. Our manufacturing workers are world-class. Building the Spirit of Tasmania here will create the highly-skilled jobs we desperately need to kickstart our economy. Building these ships will lead to hundreds of jobs at a time when more than eight per cent of us are out of work.

"If we don't act now, local apprentices like John will be a thing of the past." ●

Workplace health and safety first

Last year, the AMWU Defence and Aerospace Industry Committee decided that they wanted to lead a campaign on an issue affecting workers across the full range of workplaces they represent.



The Defence and Aerospace Committee campaigning at Parliament in 2019.

AMWU delegate and committee member, Gary Boxell, said that when it came to deciding what issue to focus on, the answer was obvious – workplace health and safety.

“We knew that workplace health and safety is an issue no matter where you work, so once we decided we wanted to campaign on that, Mike Nicolaides brought in the AMWU National OH&S Coordinator, Dave Henry, to talk to us.

“Dave gave us a list of 12 different subsets of health and safety issues we could focus on, and we went out to our workplaces and surveyed members to see which of them they ranked as most important. It was really important to us, as part of that process, that we were as representative as we could be across the whole industry”, Gary said.

Hazardous manual handling came back as the number one issue.

“When hazardous manual handling came back as the top issue, at first I was a bit surprised, but it’s actually pretty obvious when you think about it.

Manual handling is so common – it’s done everywhere and that’s why it’s so important that we do it right!”

Handling heavy or awkward items, repeatedly performing tasks requiring a particular posture, or being exposed to vibrations can lead to what is known as “body stressing” and musculoskeletal injuries.

According to recent reports, body stressing has represented 41% of workers’ compensation claims in AMWU industries.

Up to 20% of workplace musculoskeletal injuries leave workers with an acquired disability.

“As a group, we determined that the aim of the campaign is to reduce the number of musculoskeletal injuries as a result of hazardous manual handling”, Gary said.

“The main way we can do this is through education – making both members and employers aware of the risks and the benefits of avoiding or minimising these risks. There’s a financial benefit to the employer and a lifelong benefit to the worker. It’s about getting employers to realise it’s a win-win if we take action on this.

Gary is hoping that as a result of the committee’s campaign, workers and HSRs will also start thinking more about ways that dangerous lifting can be minimised.

According to recent reports, body stressing has represented 41% of workers’ compensation claims in AMWU industries.



Vacuum lifters are just one of the technologies available to make work safer.

“At my workplace, we used to manually load relatively light loads of 15-20kg, and now we do it with a crane. It takes a couple of minutes extra, but if you’re moving those loads over and over again you’re bound to injure yourself sooner or later. The extra couple of minutes are worth it for my spinal health”, Gary said.

“We want workers and their HSRs to talk to their bosses about how we assess these risks and invest in the equipment that will prevent these injuries long term. By having appropriate lifting equipment, it prevents workers from lifting heavy things, and running the risk of back injuries or other musculoskeletal injuries.

Gary’s workplace, where they work on F35s as well as other defence projects, is leading the way, having recently invested thousands of dollars in vacuum lifting technology for heavy loads.

“If you’ve got a large metal plate, say it might weigh 120kgs, and it’s made of aluminium so you can’t use magnets, there are really only two options. You can use a crane with a sling, which could get cut by sharp edges, or you can use a vacuum lift.

“They’re expensive, but it just makes us get the job done quicker and safer so the boss is happy and the workers are happy.

“These are the kinds of solutions we want bosses to invest in across the industry, rather than ad-hoc solutions that don’t properly protect workers”, Gary said. ●

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DELEGATE PROFILE

Isabelle Booth

When apprentice fitter and turner Isabelle Booth heard there was a plan to ditch on-the-job training for tradies like boilermakers, welders and sheet metal workers, she snapped into action.

The 20-year-old whipped around with a petition for her workmates at Temco in Northern Tasmania to sign and got everyone fired up.

"The proposal was stupid, there would be a complete loss of confidence in the engineering trades," she says.

Isabelle was soon on a plane on her way to Canberra so she could voice her concerns directly to decision makers in Parliament House.

"We had lots of meetings," she says.

"I met with one of my Senators, Jacqui Lambie, she's got a rep as a bogan to be honest, but was very sweet, she was very happy to help in any way possible, she was very inviting.

"The idea was to change from a four-year apprenticeship to entirely TAFE based - so you'd have no on-site experience.

"Essentially meaning you could complete a whole apprenticeship at TAFE within 3 months was a big shock to me, that's not enough experience for an entire trade.

Earning a trade has been something Isabelle has always wanted.

"I always wanted to do something with my hands and something that would allow me to travel and get lots of physical activity," she says.

"I've always loved the technical side of mechanics and this trade is a perfect blend of theory and application.

"When I got the job at Temco I was thrilled."



"Temco is an Electro Metallurgical smelter, we're a step in the process of making steel.

"There's heaps of opportunity to learn here and an abundance of tradies to annoy with my questions," she laughs.

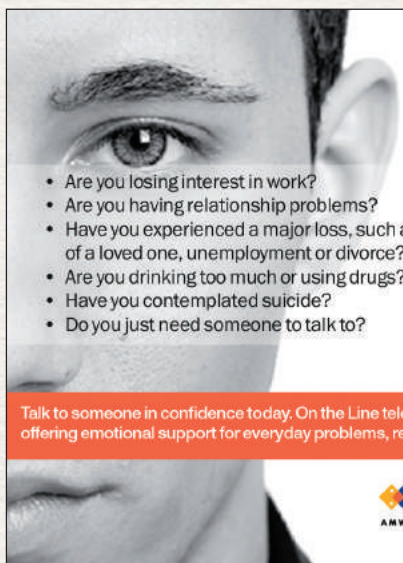
Isabelle and other apprentices from around the country were victorious in their campaign - with trades ministers from State, Federal and Territory Governments binning the proposal to allow trades training to be taken completely into the classroom.

Isabelle says it was just common sense.

"There's always more involved in trades than people think, and it takes way more than a few months at TAFE to learn it all, let alone the real life experiences, the safety aspect and interactions with experienced workmates."

The avid football player says in five years she hopes to still be practicing her trade but to have had a sea change by then.

In the meantime, Isabelle hopes to indulge her passion for hiking and meeting new people. ●



Worried about something?

- Are you losing interest in work?
- Are you having relationship problems?
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- Are you drinking too much or using drugs?
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