



MEDIA RELEASE



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SA power workers launch state-wide campaign to fight attack by Turnbull Government's building industry watchdog

South Australian power workers will tomorrow (Monday 17 July) launch a state-wide campaign against an attack on their job security and conditions by the Turnbull Government's controversial Australian Building and Construction Commission, warning it will leave consumers worse off and threatens the reliability of the state's electricity network.

The campaign, which initially features billboards, newspaper and radio advertisements, follows dozens of mass meetings of SA Power Networks workers at depots and workplaces across the state during the past fortnight where they committed to a long-running political, industrial, and legal campaign against the imposition of the building industry code on the power sector.

It follows a determination by the ABCC that employees of SAPN's Construction and Maintenance Services (CaMS) division, including the workers who repaired transmission towers following last year's devastating storm, do not provide an essential service.

The Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union has also launched legal action in the Federal Court to overturn the determination and stop the spread of the building code to workers in the power and telecommunications industries, with a hearing set down for September.

CEPU state secretary John Adley said the ABCC determination, which is the first to impact a company in the power sector, radically undermines the job security, employment conditions and wages of workers at the SAPN.

"The application of the building code to SAPN will undermine job security, open the door to skilled workers being replaced by cheap labour hire companies, strip huge levels of experience and expertise from the sector, and reduce the quality of services to consumers," Mr Adley said.

"If the Federal Government's ABCC isn't stopped, South Australian consumers will inevitably face longer power outages and less reliable services.

"South Australians deserve service by qualified, skilled, experienced professionals, not the kind of cheap cowboys who will flood the sector if the ABCC has its way.

"This campaign is about ensuring the long-term viability of the SA energy industry, the people who work in it and the customers who rely on our services."

Mr Adley said the Turnbull Government had deliberately misled South Australians about the laws, with Employment Minister Michaelia Cash assuring Senator Nick Xenophon that workers who provide essential services such as power and telecommunications would not be impacted by the new building code.

"The ABCC now claims that SAPN workers who construct the National Broadband Network, fix downed transmission towers, build substations, and connect new housing developments to the grid don't perform an essential service and as a result should have fewer workplace rights," he said.

"This is nothing less than an unjust attack on worker's rights by a Federal Government intent on cutting the wages, conditions, rights, and bargaining power of all Australian workers.

"Currently, our members are out there making sure people in the community are back up and running as quickly as possible when there's an incident, but if the ABCC gets its way they will be replaced by temporary, inexperienced labour hire."

Mr Adley said the union had written to SAPN management seeking their support for the union's ongoing legal action.

"SAPN applied to the ABCC for an exemption from the building code, which should have been granted as a formality," he said.

"We're asking them to follow through in the best interests of their workers and South Australian consumers by joining our campaign to stop the future direction of our electricity sector being dictated by Canberra."

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