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Centre for Social Change Submission to the
Senate Inquiry into the Retirement of Coal-Fired Plants

The Centre for Social Change (CSC) was established in 2012 to facilitate economic development that is both socially just and ecologically sustainable. For the last two years, the Centre has been conducting research and contributing to economic planning initiatives in coal regions across Australia including Central Queensland, the Hunter Valley and the Latrobe Valley. Through this work we have assisted local organisations to identify ways to transition their regional economies away from fossil fuels and to explore the new opportunities in moving towards zero emissions across all sectors of the economy.[1]

Over the last two years we have consulted with over 200 people including representatives of government at local, state and federal levels; Local councils; State government departments; Regional economic development and planning organisations; Business councils and Chambers of Commerce; Environment groups; Community and social service organisations; Unions; University research units; Renewable energy sector; Investment firms; Small and medium sized businesses across a range of sectors including retail, tourism and agriculture; and workers and senior executives of companies involved in the mining and use of coal for electricity generation.

The recommendations in this submission are based on results of this extensive consultation, a review of the academic literature and international case studies, and findings from a study tour of coal regions of the United States conducted by the Director of the Centre in July 2016.

This submission focuses on the range of mechanisms that can reduce the impact the transition away from coal-fired electricity generation is having on workers and communities. We also explore the range of opportunities available for workers and regions to benefit from an orderly transition in the long term, in terms of stimulating new economic development, improving local standards of living and fostering greater regional resilience.

This submission is structured into three sections:

1. The case for planned closure, with specific reference to findings from interviews undertaken by the Centre for Social Change (page2);

[1] Because of the huge and growing demand from regional areas interested in the economic potential of moving to zero emissions across all sectors, the Centre is launching a new organisation called The Next Economy.

2. Recommendations regarding mechanisms to reduce the impact of coal closure on workers and communities and to facilitate a just transition to renewable energy, drawing on relevant literature and international case studies (page 5); and

3. Recommendations regarding the appropriate role of government in facilitating a rapid and just transition away from coal-fired electricity generation and towards renewable energy (page 12).

SECTION ONE
The Case for Planned Closure

The case for a rapid and managed retirement of coal-fired electricity plants to accelerate the transition towards a renewable energy powered, zero emissions economy is strong and well supported. Planning a rapid transition away from fossil-fuel generated electricity would enable Australia to:

- Contribute to efforts to keep global warming under 2 degrees Celsius and meet our international obligations to act on climate change;
- Ensure energy security and price stabilisation well into the future;
- Reduce the impacts and maintenance costs associated with the ageing infrastructure of coal fired plants;
- Reduce the health and pollution impacts on workers and communities; and
- Seize the opportunity to build innovative, renewable energy powered industries that create new jobs and industries in regional areas.

While all of these points were cited in interviews conducted by the Centre for Social Change, four points emerged as particularly significant indicators of a high level of support for planned closure. Each of these points are described below.

1.1. Widespread acceptance of the inevitability of the transition

There is a general acceptance across all sectors that the transition from fossil fuels to renewables is not only inevitable, but already occurring.[2] Even senior executives in coal and gas industries acknowledged the need to shift to renewables both privately and publicly. As Andrew Vessey, CEO of AGL has said publicly:

> It is important that government policy incentivise investment in lower-emitting technology while at the same time ensuring that older, less efficient and reliable power stations are removed from Australia's energy mix. (Hannam 2015)

[2] Since 2010 six coal fired power stations have been retired: Morwell and Anglesea in Victoria, Playford B and Northern in South Australia, and Redbank, Wallerawang and Munmorah in New South Wales (Teske 2016). Hazelwood power station in the Latrobe Valley is marked for closure in March 2017.

Not only is this acceptance of the transition being driven by global shifts towards renewable energy and the need to act on climate change, but also the age of existing infrastructure and cost of maintaining it. As one investment banker reflected in an interview: "When electricity sector was being privatised in the 90s, we had the chance to buy Hazelwood, but we didn't dare go there, given how old it was and how much it was going to cost to maintain in the long run".

This level of acceptance of a transition are echoed elsewhere, most recently in a new report authored by prominent Australians including the Vice-chancellor of University of New South Wales Ian Jacobs, former Telstra boss David Thodey, Credit Suisse investment banker Mark Burrows, Citibank Australia chair Sam Mostyn and former Australian governor-general Quentin Bryce (Jacobs 2016).

1.2. Overwhelming support for increased investment in renewable energy

The overwhelming majority of the people consulted expressed strong support for the rapid expansion of renewable energy:

- Surprisingly, most people cited research from organisations including the University of New South Wales, Beyond Zero Emissions and The University of Technology Sydney that suggested Australia should adopt much more ambitious renewable energy targets, given that it is both technically and economically feasible to generate 100% of our electricity from renewable sources by 2030 (Teske, S. et al 2016).
- Many pointed to the growing and widespread support for renewable energy at a local government level with an increasing number of councils officially committing to achieving 100% renewable energy.
- A number of business leaders and others expressed a fear that Australia is being left behind the rest of the world, given the global investment in renewable energy, particularly by Australia's trading partners India and China.
- Many expressed frustration with cuts to ARENA and the CEFC and questioned why the government is not investing more to accelerate the transition and capture the economic benefits that will flow from new projects, especially in rural and regional areas.
- Two investment bankers expressed disappointment in the government's seeming inability to create a stable climate policy environment, citing this as the reason why there had not been more private investment in the renewable energy sector in Australia.

1.3. Widespread anger at a lack of coherent, consistent and well-funded policies to facilitate a smooth transition for workers and communities

Many of those interviewed expressed concern regarding Australia's ability to manage structural adjustment:

- Representatives from unions including the ACTU, CFMEU, ETU and AMWU cited Australia's poor track record in restructuring other industries such as forestry, car manufacturing and the clothing and textiles industries. They quoted research (Webber et.al 2001; Owen 2012; Daian 2012; Armstrong 2008) that showed that when major industries shut down, generally only a third of workers find equivalent full time work following their retrenchment; one third move into lower quality jobs (lower wage, lower job status or into part-time and casual work); with the rest unable to find any work.
- A number of interviewees also expressed frustration with the lack of government planning and action prior to the recent closures of power stations at Port Augusta and Anglesea, citing the significant negative impacts the closures have had on both workers and local communities.
- Everyone interviewed believed that both State and Federal government needed to do more ***before*** closure to protect workers' entitlements; support training programs; and assist them to find new jobs.

1.4. Support for greater economic diversification in closure affected regions

All of the people we have interviewed in regional Australia supported the need for greater support for:

- Economic planning to diversify the regional economy in ways that build on the existing strengths, assets and industries in the area.
- Greater investment in infrastructure that would support both existing and new industries to develop.
- Skills-based education and training, not only in renewable energy, but across all sectors, including health and aged-care, land-use and agriculture, construction, transport and small-scale manufacturing.
- The development of businesses and projects that can move regions to zero emissions across all sectors – particularly in the areas of electricity generation, buildings and energy efficiency, land use practices, transport systems, and waste management.

Across the board, everyone agreed that government should do more to create the enabling conditions for this regional growth to occur. Even senior executives from private industry agreed that the market alone cannot deliver the type of long-term investments that regions need, and that it is the government's responsibility to provide the right mix of incentives to attract investment that will ensure the best possible outcomes for workers and communities.

SECTION TWO

Minimising the Costs of Closure and Providing a Just Transition for Affected Workers and Communities

Minimising the impact of closure and providing a just transition for workers and community involves:

- Investing in workers and protecting their entitlements;
- Economic diversification across regions to create new jobs and business growth;
- Ensuring ongoing energy security;
- Protecting vulnerable and marginalised groups from transition-related impacts; and
- Funding the transition.

2.1. Investing in Workers and Protecting Entitlements:

The types of assistance workers require are well documented (ACTU 2016; Armstrong et al 2008; Loxton et al 2011; Schultz et al 2016) and include:

2.1.1. Financial Assistance:

- Ensuring that workers get their full entitlements paid out by companies.
- Workers being offered decent voluntary redundancy packages.
- Additional financial assistance payments, such as business start-up loans, travel subsidies or relocation allowances.

2.1.2 Employment Assistance:

- Deploying workers from plants due to close to other power stations or into renewable energy jobs as they become available, as has been successfully applied in Germany (ACTU 2016; Galgóczi 2014; Schultz et al 2016;).[3]
- Ensuring that companies properly decommission and rehabilitate sites, thus creating ongoing jobs for some workers. [4]
- Offering older workers dignified early retirement packages.

[3] Offering workers the opportunity to redeploy to other plants or into renewable energy projects, or retire early has enabled an orderly reduction of 130,300 coal mining jobs in 1990 to around 12,100 in 2014, with Germany's last two coal mines scheduled for closure at the end of 2018 and most of the remaining workers with jobs already organised to go to.[3] (ACTU 2016)

[4] Environment Victoria has estimated for example that between 254 and 626 jobs could be created in mine rehabilitation in the Latrobe Valley (EV 2014). Further, it is estimated that rehabilitating the Anglesea coal-fired plant and mine site would create between 30 and 60 jobs over 10 years (Arup et al 2015).

- Offering a range of business training, incubator support and investment to workers wanting to start their own businesses.
- Establishing one-stop-shops to facilitate easy access to employment assistance and other services.

2.1.3. Training and Education:

- Investing in additional skills-based training that serves the needs of a range of economic sectors.
- Enabling workers to undertake training while still employed.

2.1.4. Personal Support for Workers and their Families:

- Providing access to both financial and psychological counselling to individuals and families.
- Maintaining broader social protection measures such as providing access to health services and social insurances.
- Trialling innovative economic support mechanisms before closure, such as the Universal Basic Income and regulating for shorter working hours for workers across all sectors.

2.2. Economic Diversification to Create New Jobs

Achieving sustainable, fair, timely and integrated economic development in closure affected areas will require: 1) Comprehensive transition planning that builds on the existing regional assets and industries; 2) Strong coordination of transition activities by a central regional body; 3) Adequate funding to boost development across all economic sectors; and 4) Exploring the economic opportunities in moving to a zero emissions future.

2.2.1. Comprehensive Transition Planning

Effective transition planning processes involve:

- A range of participatory methods[5] that ensure the broadest possible input from workers and affected communities in decision-making processes.
- Identifying the range of existing assets, skills, infrastructure and industries in the region as the first step towards building on them to strengthen and diversify the local economic system.
- Identifying the infrastructure gaps (for example communication and transportation infrastructure) that can stimulate business development across multiple economic sectors.

[5] Participatory techniques extend beyond community forums and surveys and may include techniques such as citizen juries, photo voice; personal narratives; street theatre; and participatory budgeting.

- Engaging external, professional expertise to assist in the facilitation of key planning activities to ensure that processes are as transparent, inclusive, creative and holistic as possible.

2.2.2. Coordinating the Transition

Regional transition planning bodies such as the Latrobe Valley Authority need to be established to coordinate the transition in a timely and responsive manner**.** Important considerations for the formation of regional planning authorities include:

- Extending their membership beyond government, industry, and unions to include representatives from diverse community groups (including representatives of Indigenous groups, key ethnic groups, faith groups and youth leaders), local business leaders, and environment groups (Loxton 2011; Jolley 2011).
- That they are established well in advance of any closures so that transition plans are already in place, and investment, support programs and infrastructure projects are already underway.
- They are well funded over a number of years to ensure long term, holistic planning.

2.2.3. Regional Economic Development Funding

Effective and long-term economic development requires adequate funding to support:

- Participatory planning processes
- Infrastructure development across a range of sectors, including transport, communication and agriculture
- Full rehabilitation of sites
- Research, development and innovation
- The strengthening of existing local businesses by providing access to subsidies, market linkage support, and business development expertise.[6]
- The development of innovative approaches to create greater local resilience to future shocks associated with climate change and global economic fluctuations.

The newly established Latrobe Valley Authority[7] provides a comprehensive model of how to coordinate planning efforts in that it will:

[6] Often business incentives are designed to attract investment from large companies, whereas more could be done to strengthen and develop new small to medium sized local businesses that are not only significant employers, but are more likely to reinvest profits into the local community.
[7] For more information, visit: www.lva.vic.gov.au

- Provide a range of financial and practical support to workers, including a one-stop-shop to facilitate access to employment and other services;
- Fund infrastructure development across a range of sectors including health, education and transport.
- Provide incentives to encourage business development, including the establishment of an 'Economic Growth Zone' to enable the 'fast tracking' of projects and reduction in 'red tape'.

For this approach to be successful in facilitating a just transition for both workers and the community in the Latrobe Valley, caution must be exercised with regards to the relaxation of regulatory requirements. Without adequate social and environmental protections in place, the region could be left vulnerable to predatory business practices that extract profits without investing in the long-term viability of the region, to the ultimate detriment of the people who live there. If we are serious about a 'just' transition, mechanisms to ensure environmental, social and worker protection cannot be compromised for short-term profits and economic growth.

2.2.4. Developing a Zero Emissions Economy:

The current transformation of Australia's energy sector presents a unique opportunity to create the next wave of zero emissions business and jobs. Modelling by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research shows that by taking strong action to embrace renewable energy and energy efficiency, Australia could create 1 million new jobs, increase GDP by 12.9% and reduce pollution by 80% by 2040 (cited in ACF et al 2015).

In addition to jobs in renewable energy generation, services and equipment manufacturing, enormous potential exists to stimulate economic growth across other sectors of the economy including transport, building construction, waste management and agriculture. Investing in reducing emissions across these areas would create jobs involved in:

- Housing and construction, including energy efficiency auditing and retrofitting;
- Constructing the infrastructure needed to support the roll out of electric vehicles, such as charging stations;
- Expanding public transport services and infrastructure; and
- Land-use practices that could help to absorb carbon out of the atmosphere.

Concerted efforts to build the zero emissions economy are already underway in France and Germany (Rifkin 2011) where regions are taking advantage of emerging technologies like 3D printing, and decentralised energy production and trading to undertake smaller-scale, collectively-owned manufacturing. It

is initiatives like these that point to a new way to retain jobs, profits, investments, services and other benefits in regional areas.

This kind of approach could be used to establish energy innovation hubs in areas affected by closures, such as has been proposed by Voices of the Valley in the Latrobe Valley[8]. Such hubs of innovation hold the potential for affected regions to become leaders of the next energy revolution, serving as catalysts for:

- Research and development of new innovations in renewable energy production, storage and manufacturing.
- Education and training for workers to develop the skills needed in the new economy.
- Attracting other services and industries into regional areas, including government services and agencies. This would not only bring more money into the regions, which in turn would support local businesses, but could also help to address the housing affordability crisis in major cities.

2.3. Ensuring Energy Security Through Strong Investment in Renewable Energy:

While recent concerns over power outages in South Australia have led to significant public debate about the ability of renewable energy to provide a stable supply of electricity, authorities and experts in the energy sector point to policy failures and the ferocity of storm activity as primarily responsible for power shortages (Dargaville 2016; Ison 2016).

Despite concerns about supply, there remains significant capacity across the national electricity grid. Across the National Electricity Market, the average power station is operating at 65% capacity. There is therefore approximately 9.1GW of spare capacity in the grid (Dargaville 2016). Furthermore, the demand for energy has been continuously falling since 2007 (Australian Energy Regulator 2015).

Of greater threat to energy security is the age of the existing power infrastructure, which will need to be completely replaced within the next two decades (Teske 2016). This will be an expensive undertaking, whichever source of fuel is used to generate electricity.

The other major threat to the system is the lack of government investment and regulations to accelerate the transition to renewable energy. While Australia has seen cuts to public investment in renewable energy, governments in countries like the United States, Germany and China have set ambitious targets and implemented regulations to reduce emissions, while simultaneously investing significantly in renewable energy technologies and storage capacity (Climate Change Authority 2014). Consequently, while the United States is seeing

[8] For more information, visit: www.votv.org.au

renewable energy jobs growing at 12 times the rate of general jobs growth in 2015, with already more solar energy jobs than in oil and gas extraction (Climate Change Authority 2014), Australia has lost over 5,000 renewable energy jobs since their peak in 2012 (ABS 2014).

When Australian governments have offered incentives to encourage the uptake of renewable energy, we have seen a significant increases in uptake at both a household and industry level. Between 2010 and 2016 for example, solar PV capacity increased 37 fold, from 133 MW to 5095.5 MW (Australian PV Institute 2015).

Measures that could further improve the supply of renewable energy include:

- Encouraging the further uptake of renewable energy at a household and community level by providing incentives for battery storage and / or establishing a national feed-in tariff.
- At an industry level, providing greater funding for the CEFC and ARENA, with one report advocating an increase of ARENA's budget to $2bn over the 2016-2022 period (Getup et al 2016).
- Greater support for community owned renewable energy projects and cooperative ownership. Such mechanisms could provide much need energy security in remote and Indigenous communities that remain dependent on the importation of diesel. Not only can such mechanisms improve supply and create new jobs, but they also offer the additional benefits of generating and keeping wealth within communities.
- Support for further research into the potential for Local Electricity Trading Schemes that enable greater sharing of the benefits of energy production within local communities.
- In addition to measures to increase the overall supply of renewable energy, mechanisms are also needed to further reduce demand by increasing energy efficiency and investing in behaviour change programs (COAG Energy Council 2015)

2.4. Ensuring that Already Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups are not Further Disadvantaged by the Transition:

A just transition means establishing mechanisms to ensure that the most marginalised groups - including communities directly impacted by closure, low income households, pensioners, Indigenous communities and remote communities - are not further disadvantaged by increasing costs and less stable energy supplies.

Measures that could facilitate the greater sharing of the benefits transitioning to renewable energy include:

- Community-owned renewable energy initiatives;
- Solar gardens for renters;

- Farmer bio-energy hubs;
- Community wind farms;
- House retrofitting and other energy efficiency initiatives; and
- On-bill financing mechanisms for low-income households.

2.5. Funding the Transition:

Adequately funding the transition will require a mix of private and public funding. There is no avoiding the fact that the transformation of Australia's energy sector will be expensive. The most commonly cited mechanisms to fund this transition include:

- Introducing a price on carbon
- Placing a levy on coal exports
- Ensuring companies meet their obligations in fully funding worker entitlements and the costs associated with proper rehabilitation of sites
- Redirecting fossil fuel subsidies towards renewable energy generation
- Local, state and federal government funding
- Introducing a reverse auction bidding process to not only accelerate closure, but fund the transition (Jotzo 2015)
- Private investment funds, including superannuation and ethical investment funds

SECTION THREE

The Role of Federal Government in Enabling a Smooth and Just Transition

As highlighted throughout this submission, and in international examples of successful restructuring (such as in Germany), it is crucial that the Federal Government play a central role in coordinating the transition. Unlike the German example however, we do not have twenty-five years to transition away from coal - not only because of the pressing climate imperative, but also because the pace of technological change could threaten the stability and security of the current energy system if individuals and communities start to go 'off grid'. We need to act fast.

Ambitious and visionary leadership from the Federal government is needed if Australia is to:

- Make the transition in the time needed;
- Bring together all levels of government, regulators, industry, unions, and community groups to plan the transition;
- Muster the scale of investment required to rebuild our energy system;
- Develop the technical capacity, skills and spaces in the market for new solutions to emerge;
- Create a more stable policy environment to enable private investment flows;
- Ensure that costs are shared equitably; and
- Plan for the long-term resilience of regions rather than implement short-term fixes.

Because of the level of coordination required in such a complex policy space, the transition cannot be left to market mechanisms to resolve. To properly manage this transition and ensure a just transition for everyone, Australia needs a new national authority. Some of responsibilities of this authority could include:

- Overseeing the funding and coordination of transition planning at both a national and regional level.
- Coordinating with other authorities and government agencies to ensure that the scale, type and pace of the transition will enable us to meet (and ideally surpass) our international climate obligations to reduce emissions.
- Coordinating an industry-wide, multi-employer redeployment scheme to provide retrenched workers with the opportunity to transfer to other power generators.
- Ensuring companies meet their responsibilities to workers in terms of redundancy payments and entitlements, retraining opportunities, and

generating jobs through the full decommissioning and rehabilitation of sites.

Governments played the central role in building our current energy system and they will need to play a central role in constructing the new one as well. A failure to do so risks future generations inheriting a fragmented, inequitable, expensive and ineffective system.

Conclusion:

Australia can manage the transition from coal to renewable energy generated electricity in a way that guarantees the security of energy supply, the stabilisation of electricity prices, appropriate cost sharing, job creation and regional economic development.

Without proactive and strong leadership, the transition will still happen. It is inevitable. What is not inevitable is whether it happens in a way that protects the welfare of workers and captures the benefits of the energy transformation for the affected communities and Australia as a whole. We could all be better off in the long term, but we need to start now.

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