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Daniel Walton National and NSW Secretary



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20 March 2020

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via Email: scott.morrison.MP@aph.gov.au

Dear Prime Minister

As you are aware, the Australian economy and workforce are facing unprecedented uncertainty due to the rapidly unfolding COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

As the nation's oldest union and one of the largest, the Australian Workers' Union ('AWU') represents workers across the entire Australian economy.

AWU members work for companies in the heavy industrial manufacturing including businesses that produce steel, aluminium, chemicals, and building materials as well as primary industries such as mining and agriculture. Our members also work in the energy production supply chain including oil & gas exploration and extraction, hydropower, oil and fuel refining, and gas-fired power generation.

During the Global Financial Crisis – the last time our nation was systemically threatened – the AWU worked closely alongside the federal government and Australia's major industrial businesses on a tripartite basis to ensure Australia kept its businesses and its people working.

Our joint response ensured that Australian workers and businesses were supported during the crisis which prevented a massive collapse in economic activity, employment and prevented Australia from unnecessarily deindustrialising.

We stand ready to work with you again.

While the nature of the threat is different on this occasion it is clear that Australia will require a massively coordinated response to deal with the complex supply, demand and confidence shock underway globally.

Australia's manufacturing sector employs nearly one million Australians, with many of these jobs and their downstream economic benefits located in regional centres of Australia. During this period of global economic and supply uncertainty, we need these industries and these jobs more than ever. It is vital that Australia continues to supply itself with the things it needs when it needs them.

As the government injects fiscal and monetary stimulus into the economy it is critical that strong 'buy local' guidelines are deployed to secure Australian businesses and supply chains. Furthermore government procurement, infrastructure and industry policy can provide important avenues of direct and indirect employment.

Of particular concern to AWU members is the ongoing uncertainty relating to the continuous operation of major industrial production sites. As you would be aware, many of Australia's major manufacturing sites including steel, aluminium and oil and gas facilities are continuous operations that require large, twenty-four-seven workforces in order to maintain production.

A major concern for these facilities is the difficulty and expense associated with any shutdown of production. Global and domestic experience shows that sites forced to shut due to external shocks often do not open again, causing enormous economic damage to the economy and local communities. It is critical that we ensure that Australia's manufacturing sites are sufficiently secure from a demand and supply shock and that large workforces are able to safely obtain access to keep production running.

We seek an urgent meeting with you or your broader ministerial and advisory team so that we can share policy responses available to the country to deal with this extraordinary challenge.

Please have your office contact my Executive Assistant Debra Bushell on mobile 0412 431 352 to arrange a suitable time to meet.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Walton', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel Walton
NATIONAL SECRETARY