Queensland Convention charts way ahead to meet challenges
Black Lung 100% preventable

- Maintain adequate ventilation and sprays
- Be aware of dust sources in your workplace
- Avoid operating downwind of dust sources if possible
- Wear respiratory PPE correctly
- Attend your regular medical assessments
- Get a chest x-ray when advised

‘Protecting against airborne dust exposure in coal mines’ is now available to download from www.coalservices.com.au
When Delegates from all our workplaces throughout Australia gather for our Union’s 2016 National Convention from 17-21 October, they will discuss the daunting challenges we face and collectively determine the best way to meet them. Significantly, the theme of this Convention is Fighting for the Future. That’s because the future doesn’t just fall into your lap. You have to plan for it, organise for it and fight for it.

The truth is that we live in challenging times.

In our mining industries, prices are down and the employers have intensified their attacks on our jobs and are undermining conditions and rights at work. Even safety is under attack and Black Lung, that killer disease the bosses told us had been eradicated in Australia decades ago, is back with a vengeance. In energy, the electricity sector is being restructured and our members face an increasingly insecure future.

Internationally and domestically as economies restructure, labour market regulation is being torn apart as big powerful interests seek to increase their wealth at the expense of decent jobs and fair pay and conditions. With the increasing emergence of new technologies, industries are facing massive disruption with little or no consideration given to the plight of workers, our families and communities.

The Union movement nationally and internationally is under constant attack. We have seen here in Australia that Unions like our CFMEU and the MUA are particularly singled out to be demonised and attacked. That is because we are effective. It is because the big business powers and their conservative political allies deep down fear us. They know we won’t back down and that we will fight for workers. That drives their desperation to try and break us.

But we are under no illusions. We have a Federal Conservative LNP Government that has scraped back to power in Canberra, so any issue that requires legislative change will be that much harder.

At this forthcoming National Convention we are asking Delegates from all the workplaces we cover to be hard hitting and frank. Our leaders reports will certainly be and they may contain something of a shock for some. For others it will merely confirm their emerging view.

Everything we do as a Union to improve wages and conditions and the welfare of our communities is underpinned by the economic strength or weakness of the industries we cover.

We will examine the strategies being used by employers to undermine the regulatory framework of the Fair Work Act. We will put the contracting, casualization and labour hire strategies they use to drive down their costs and shift the burden to the workforce under the microscope.

We also need to look longer term at their ‘remote control/automation’ strategy. It seems their commitment to employees and communities doesn’t include providing much employment – not that it ever did.

We’ll focus on their disgraceful lack of commitment to Australia as we look at their record on tax avoidance and the billions they are ripping us off for.

No analysis of our situation is complete without an assessment of the political landscape. The situation in 2016 is eerily similar to the one in 1915 when the Miners Federation was formed. Bosses are demanding pay cuts and labour market deregulation and sponsoring their own political party to do it.

Likewise the Union is demanding legislative change to eliminate exploitation in the workplace and fight for a fair go for all. We are using a political party to achieve it.

Which brings us to ‘the state of the union’. Let’s appreciate where we’ve come from, let’s have a sober assessment of where we are and let’s discuss where we want to be in 5, 10 and 20 years.

Our Central Executive Report will focus on this. The rest of the agenda is similarly set on building a fair and decent future – the future of the CFMEU, the future of the Australian trade union movement and the future of the global trade unions. We know from past bitter and hard fought experience that Unity is Strength and that United we Stand and Divided we Fall. Convention 2016 must be the foundation for building into our second century as a proud and fighting Union.
Just when you thought they could go no lower, the big coal mining companies have plunged to new levels in seeking to rob workers of hundreds of millions in Redundancy and Accident Pay entitlements.

As this column goes to press, a coalition of some of the biggest coal companies in Australia have applied to the Fair Work Commission to cap Redundancy payments for coal miners at the equivalent of 9-years maximum, instead of reflecting actual years served. They are also seeking to reduce Accident Pay entitlements from the existing 78-weeks to 52-weeks. Both applications would apply to all existing coal mine workers retroactively!

At present, coal mine employees redundancy entitlements under the Award provides for 3-weeks pay for every year of service. (This is made up of one week’s severance pay for every year of service and two weeks retrenchment pay for every year of service). There is no cap on this Award entitlement.

Now, the employers are seeking to impose a maximum redundancy payment of 27-weeks for any employee made redundant. Their redundancy cap would apply to the entire workforce, meaning any employee who has already accumulated entitlements above 9-years of service would lose them. For example, an employee with 30-years service would get just 27-weeks redundancy pay instead of 90-weeks under the present Award.

Our Union is fighting these disgraceful Redundancy and Accident Pay attacks by coal employers that would deprive employees of hundreds of millions of dollars in entitlements. Mining companies only have one reason for this attempted daylight robbery – to further boost profits at the expense of hard working employees.

These attacks on coal mineworkers entitlements would have wide reaching implications for every employee in the coal industry, particularly as the vast majority of the workforce have more than 9-years service. You can easily work out how much you would stand to lose if the employers were to be successful.

Research Commissioned by our Union and carried out by Professor David Peetz from Queensland’s Griffith University reveals that the loss to coal mine employees could be up to $380 million.

In addition to the impact this would have on individual workers and our families, entire communities would be affected with the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars that would have been spent and reinvested in the local economy.

Most of the mining companies profits are already channelled overseas. Robbing mineworkers and our families of our proper existing entitlements would further swell the fortunes of foreign investors at the expense of Australian families and our communities.

Redundancy and Accident pay entitlements are essential to help keep families and communities together and it is a breach of faith with the workforce to try and strip this fundamental entitlement from loyal workers.

Mining companies have short memories. They quickly forget that each of their workers returns over one million dollars to the company each year. Coal mineworkers deliver big time for their employers but in return greedy mining companies are trying to further rob us of our fair entitlements.

Our Union has made it clear that we will fight this all the way. We will not accept this daylight robbery.

Our Union, through our National Legal Department, has made its submission to the Fair Work Commission on the employers attempt to cap Redundancy Pay entitlements.

You can access all submissions, statements and correspondence to the Fair Work Commission on http://bit.ly/2aBtKo
1.3 million more reasons why it pays to belong to the Union

Record compensation payout for victimised Hail Creek coal miner

When the Federal Court ordered Rio Tinto to pay victimised CFMEU Hail Creek coal miner Michael Haylett $1,272,109 in damages and compensation, and $24,600 more in interest payments, an amount nearly unprecedented in workplace disputes, in brought to an end years of pain and suffering for Michael and his family.

Throughout his six-year ordeal, Michael was grateful to have the Union always in his corner and always there to support and fight for him.

“I can’t imagine where I would be now without the Union, without the support of my work mates and the great team of lawyers at Hall Payne that the Union provided for me. It has made such a difference to my life and that of my entire family,” Michael told Common Cause.

Michael Haylett's case shows that workers aren't alone and can stand up to improper and illegal treatment in the workplace with the support of a strong Union committed to its rank and file.

The case, run by the CFMEU and Hall Payne Lawyers, was described by Queensland District President Stephen Smyth as a David and Goliath battle against a global mining giant.

“This has been a long and hard fought case. Michael Haylett is finally getting justice after years of fighting one of the world’s most powerfull mining companies for his unfair sacking.

“The payment of $1.3 million in damages and back pay will go some way to compensating Michael for the pain, suffering and poor treatment he’s endured over the years, it shouldn’t have to be necessary.

“This was a vendetta against Michael Haylett that Rio Tinto has been running for years. The way the company acted in this matter, beginning with the heavy-handed and illegal sacking of a worker, to ignoring a Supreme Court order, is completely unacceptable and the additional penalty of $50,000 ordered by the Court against Rio reflects just how appalling the treatment was.

“The plain truth is that Michael was injured at work, and then sacked through no fault of his own – these last three years of legal proceedings have been difficult for Michael, but he persisted with the support of our Union and he thoroughly deserves this victory. Finally, Rio Tinto has been held to account for their callous behaviour,” said Stephen Smyth.

Michael Haylett’s case shows that workers aren’t alone and can stand up to improper and illegal treatment in the workplace with the support of a strong Union committed to its rank and file.

“We pursued Michael’s case all the way to the Federal Court confident that it would find Rio Tinto’s decision to stand him down was done in retaliation for winning his damages claim,” Stephen Smyth told Common Cause.

“We argued it was in breach of the Fair Work Act. In his decision against Rio and in favour of Michael, Justice Reeves highlighted the lack of remorse that the company had for their actions as a major factor in his decision,” he said.

Solicitors from Hall Payne Lawyers said that they had seldom seen worse treatment of an employee by a company, with Rio Tinto’s defiance of Supreme Court orders and arrogance nearly unprecedented.

Indeed, it is a view that reinforces Justice Reeves’s comments reported in the first issue of Common Cause this year in which he described Rio’s actions as “disgraceful” and Michael’s case as one with a “remarkable history” characterised by the “resilience” of the worker and the “recalcitrance” of the company.
Union continues fight for Tahmoor jobs as Glencore fast-forwards mine closure

As this issue of Common Cause goes to press, our Union is calling on Federal and State political representatives to get behind our call to fight for future jobs at the Tahmoor Colliery as Glencore announced it is bringing forward the closure date of the mine.

NSW South/Western Vice-President Bob Timbs told Common Cause that while there is 14.2 million tonnes remaining within the existing Tahmoor lease, there is easy access to up to another 100 million tonnes in the neighbouring Bargo lease that can be profitably mined if the Tahmoor mine’s infrastructure is left in place.

Bob Timbs described the decision to close Tahmoor as “part of Glencore’s scorched earth policy. Rather than put the mine on care and maintenance, Glencore wants to trash it and sterilise billions of dollars worth of coal by just walking away. The Government should not tolerate this. Glencore should be told to use or lose the lease. It has no right to destroy this valuable resource that after all belongs to the people. The lease should be offered to a company that is prepared to operate it,” Bob Timbs told Common Cause.

While Glencore seems intent on closing Tahmoor, our Union is lobbying the Federal Liberal and State MPs to stand up for local jobs.

“We know there is lots of life left for Tahmoor with the Bargo extension and the existing lease but that is really only feasible if the existing infrastructure is left in place,” said Bob Timbs. “That would ensure hundreds of jobs in our region and secure the future for many families as well as boosting the local economy.”

So far though, the State and Federal Liberal politicians have not come to the party. “I don’t know if they are intimidated by the prospect of facing up to a powerful multinational like Glencore or whether they are afraid of taking on the Greenies and NIMBYs who oppose coal mining and would not support the Bargo extension,” said Bob Timbs.

Bob is a former Tahmoor miner himself and held numerous positions within the Union. He is a second generation Tahmoor miner whose father and uncle retired from the pit and has a cousin who still works there.

District Secretary Lee Webb is also a former Tahmoor miner with 28-years of service at the mine. He is a former Lodge Secretary. Both Lee and Bob played leading roles in the long running Xstrata dispute at Tahmoor that ran for 23-months and only reached a conclusion in late 2010 after determined industrial action supported by the community.

“We fought hard for our rights and conditions in that dispute and we fought hard for jobs and a better future,” Lee told Common Cause.

“Xstrata then became Glencore and I’d have to say that this company has made a fortune from its Tahmoor operation and now because profits are more modest it is prepared to shut the mine down. But our Union is not giving up. We know we could keep hundreds of mineworkers in jobs, their families secure and our local economy better off. And that’s worth fighting for.”

As things stand, some 30 employees were offered voluntary redundancies immediately after Glencore decided to bring forward the mine’s scheduled 2019 closure to 2018.

If Glencore’s decision stands at Tahmoor, all development work would be completed by early 2017, when further reductions in employees are scheduled to take place with mining expected to end in early 2018.

Bob Timbs said that Tahmoor has been operating since 1979. It has a workforce of 350 and last year produced 2.1 million tonnes of saleable metallurgical coal.

“Tahmoor is a mine with a proud past and a great record of contributing to our community,” Bob Timbs told Common Cause. “It is also a mine that deserves a future. It has over 14 million tonnes of quality coking coal on the existing lease that is worth around $1.4Billion. There is up to another 100 million tonnes worth around another $10Billion. No company should be allowed to destroy such valuable resources.

“On top of this we have a skilled, proven and committed workforce at Tahmoor. All that is required to secure the mine’s future is some political backbone and some corporate responsibility. If the politicians and company do that, we’ll do the rest,” Bob Timbs told Common Cause.
German Creek mineworkers fight Anglo and its industrial mercenaries

As this issue of *Common Cause* goes to press, our Union members at Anglo American’s German Creek coal mine in Central Queensland are locked in a bitter dispute for a replacement Enterprise Bargaining Agreement as the multinational company presses its hard line to deny them a fair go, including a plan to recruit industrial mercenaries to break the legally protected industrial action at the mine.

Now in their third year of negotiations with Anglo for a new EBA, the German Creek mineworkers had enough of the company’s intransigence and embarked on weeks of protected industrial action.

Queensland District Vice-President Glenn Power told *Common Cause* that Anglo has “engaged in a war of attrition with workers at German Creek in recent years to frustrate negotiations and postpone the new agreement. Workers voted overwhelmingly by a factor of 9 to 1 in favour of a campaign of protected industrial action that was met by the company seeking to replace them with scab labour”.

Glenn paid tribute to the resilience and determination of the German Creek mineworkers to fight for a fair deal. “The previous Enterprise Agreement expired on 4 April 2014. “There have been 16 separate Enterprise Bargaining meetings since negotiations began. It is clear the company had no intention of negotiating in good faith, but is simply using delay tactics to avoid ever coming to a fair agreement,”

Glenn Power told *Common Cause*. “There are some really basic things Anglo are objecting to – for example we are trying to get the company to comply with safety and health regulations and to get some basic commitments on job security for workers.

“Workers at German Creek have contributed tens of millions of dollars to Anglo’s bottom line and they deserve good, steady jobs. Anglo is true to form – conducting itself with disdain for its workforce. But our Union members have shown they are prepared to fight for a fair go”.

In a very innovative media campaign, the German Creek Lodge took its case to the public outlining their basic demands and pointing to Anglo’s chequered past, including its history of employing slave labour in apartheid South Africa; cases of dust related diseases, including Black Lung, diagnosed in its Queensland mines in recent months; and the fact it currently faces prosecution over the death of a Queensland coal miner.

As public support swung behind the striking miners, Anglo moved to bring in strike-breakers to undermine the German Creek miners campaign of protected and legal industrial action.

Queensland District President Stephen Smyth told *Common Cause* that the Union had been tipped off that Anglo engaged labour hire company WorkPac to advertise for Excavator Operators to replace the striking workforce, with the firm resorting to cold-calling known coalmine workers and offering them a sweetheart deal better than those offered to existing employees.

Stephen Smyth described this as a ham fisted attempt to recruit industrial mercenaries to break a legal strike. As we go to press, the public backlash against Anglo’s planned bastardry has so far seen the company hold its hand.

Among the outstanding items the German Creek Lodge is seeking in the new Enterprise Agreement are:
- Removal of a casual clause to ensure secure, steady jobs for workers and to stop the casualization of the permanent workforce.
- Compliance with Coal Mining Safety and Health Act and Regulations.
- A fair and transparent process for worker redundancy.
- Inclusion of coal industry standard for Accident Pay.

Follow developments in the German Creek dispute on our website www.cfmeu.com.au
Coal prices improve outlook
By Peter Colley, National Research Director

There is something of a rebound in coal prices occurring that is providing some breathing space for the industry, though how long it lasts is open to question.

The Newcastle spot price for thermal coal increased from around US$50 per tonne at the end of April to just short of US$70 per tonne towards the end of August – an increase of around 37%. In early September it eased back to about US$66 per tonne.

What has driven this turnaround is a substantial drop in Indonesian coal exports (in the order of 100 million tonnes in 2015), further decline in US exports, and a Chinese government order for Chinese coal production to decline. China has also sought to maintain its one-third drop in coal imports but has been less successful in doing so – leading to imports increasing somewhat. How long this lasts in the supply/demand balance is anyone's guess – as well as whether China manages to restrict coal imports there is the question of whether India succeeds in its stated goal of ending thermal coal imports in favour of domestic production.

Metallurgical coal prices are also surging, with spot prices in early September reaching US$140 per tonne. But very little of this coal is sold on the spot market, so there is more of a focus on quarterly benchmark prices. In early September they were widely expected to pick up significantly from around US$92 per tonne.

BHP Billiton is maintaining its commitment to coal production – it is even thought to be bidding for some of Anglo American's met coal assets – and in August announced its annual results. While the headline figure was a big loss of US$6.2 billion, the cash operating (EBITDA) profit for Queensland coal was US$584 million and for NSW Energy coal was US$133 million.

Rio Tinto’s coal assets remain up for sale, as are those of Anglo American, but not at fire sale prices. There remains a strong focus on improving profit margins through reducing costs. The push by some companies to reduce wages and other labour costs through using cheaper contractors will continue.

What looks better is that, rather than the coal market grinding along the bottom for another few years (as was widely expected at the beginning of this year), there has been some improvement in prices and operating margins this year. The resources boom is gone for good, but we do have some respite from very low prices.

Miner killed at Glencore’s Newlands coal operation

Our Queensland District was again rocked by another fatality with the death of well-known 55-year old Ian Hansen at Glencore’s Newlands coal mine.

Ian was killed on 31 August while employed as a UGL contract worker. At the time of the accident, he was conducting maintenance work at the site’s coal handling and preparation plant.

Our Queensland District President Stephen Smyth said the entire mining community was “very shaken”, particularly as Ian Hansen was well-known having worked at a number of Bowen Basin mines.

“It’s very upsetting. While the mining industry is large in distance, it’s small in the number of people. Ian had worked in a number of other mines, including Hail Creek”, he said.

Our Union’s Check Inspectors went to the site immediately news broke of the fatality to begin their inquiries.

On behalf of our readers, Common Cause extends its sincerest sympathy to the family, friends and work mates of Ian Hansen on their sad loss.
The annual NSW Northern Memorial Day to pay tribute to the 1,800 workers who lost their lives in the District’s coal mines has become an important feature event in the Hunter community. Held on 11 September, this year’s Service marked the 20th anniversary of the four miners who lost their lives in the Gretley Mine disaster in 1996.

In welcoming the hundreds who attended this year’s Service, particularly the families of those who lost loved ones in the mines, Northern District President Peter Jordan said: “Today’s Service provides an opportunity for mineworkers and their families, and the community to remember and pay tribute to all the mineworkers whose names appear on this Memorial Wall and to reflect upon them and their families’ loss.

“It is also an opportunity to be mindful of the countless others who have suffered life-changing injuries as a result of the real and ever-present dangers of working in the coal mining industry. And it’s a time that we can reflect back over this past year and know that, with much relief, we have not lost a mineworker in a disaster in our region and thankfully did not need to add any new names to this Memorial Wall”, he said.

Peter Jordan reflected on the tragic loss of the Gretley miners Edward Batterham, Mark Kaiser, John Hunter and Damon Murray who were killed on 14 November 1996, when they unknowingly dug into an older flooded mine, causing an inrush of water that swept them to their deaths.

He told the hundreds who gathered at the Service that the four miners should never have been killed. They were given inaccurate maps and were working in an area where they should never have been placed.

Our Union drove the push to get to the bottom of what happened at Gretley and within three weeks of the Disaster an Inquiry was established that found the deaths were preventable. “Some 43 Recommendations came from that Gretley Inquiry that led to many important reforms,” said Peter Jordan. “While we mourned the loss of the Gretley miners we did everything to make sure the lessons were learned and that measures are put in place to ensure it can never happen again”.

Fittingly, the main speaker at this year’s Memorial Service was Lee Shearer, Chief Compliance Officer NSW Resources Regulator with the Department of Industry. She spoke of the daunting challenges involved in ensuring that coal mineworkers are given the very best health and safety working environment and that all sectors of the industry comply with the most stringent laws, regulations and world’s best practices.

“As I look around at these 1,800 names of those who have lost their lives in the District’s coal mines and see the faces of many of their family members here today, I want you to know that I and my team will do everything we can to ensure that every miner returns safely and well to their family at the end of every shift. I look forward to continuing to work with the CFMEU and other stakeholders in the coal industry to do everything possible to see that no more names need to be added to this Memorial Wall,” she said.

Once again, the Memorial Service was attended by a wide range of community and industry representatives, led by our Union’s General President Tony Maher. Queensland District Secretary Tim Whyte joined Northern District Officials, Board Members, Lodge officials, rank and file members, retired members and employees of our Union.

There was an impressive number of Federal, State and Local Government representatives present as well a number of leading mine safety and community services leaders in attendance as were a number of Unions including the MUA, AMWU and Newcastle Trades Hall.

In closing, Peter Jordan said it was important that “we never forget the mineworkers whose names appear on the Memorial Wall, or those who have suffered serious bodily injuries or illness. Nor should we forget the pain and heartache felt by their families, friends and workmates.

“The passage of time never truly diminishes the grief of those affected by the loss of a loved one. An inquiry or an inquest may mark the end of proceedings for some, but for the next of kin, it will never be over”, he said.
Queensland Convention charts way ahead to meet challenges

When our Union delegates from all over Queensland met in Mackay from 22-26 August, they were dealing with a range of issues vastly different to their last District Convention four years ago.

For a start, the main issues that hung over this Convention were the re-emergence of the deadly Black Lung disease and the loss of thousands of jobs that are leading to further attacks on our members rights and conditions throughout the industry.

Starting with District President Steve Smyth’s report, none of the presentations delivered by the full-time officials pulled any punches. They were hard, open and honest and Delegates responded in a similar manner with lively questions and contributions throughout the Convention.

“There was no point in using this Convention as a showcase for the Union. It needed to be a tough and uncompromising assessment of where we are at, the challenges we are facing and what we need to do about them,” Steve Smyth told Common Cause.

General President Tony Maher outlined the main issues facing all our members in the mining and energy industries. He spoke of the need to consolidate our strengths and to build for the future by aligning the Union with others that share our values and objectives. He reinforced the importance of the CFMEU and the MUA amalgamating to provide a more powerful force for members of our two great Unions.

One of the most powerful presentations was delivered by the three District Check Inspectors Steve Woods, Jason Hill and Greg Dalliston. They detailed the issues in the tragic incidents that led to the loss of miners lives since the last Convention and the lessons we need to draw from them. They also emphasised the scandal of the re-emergence of Black Lung disease.

In a Resolution adopted unanimously by Convention on Black Lung and Other Dust Related Diseases, Delegates pledged their full support for the Victims campaign, including a levy on coal to assist them.

In a further Resolution on Black Lung, Delegates unanimously declared their unreserved support for “continuing the campaign by the Union in respect of Black Lung and...
“other dust related diseases.” This campaign, they said, should “expose the lies and cover-ups by companies, government and medical professionals …… as well as potential prosecution of guilty parties along with compensation for those people who have been handed a death sentence due to this.

“Furthermore, changes to legislation must occur to address dust monitoring issues, health surveillance issues, coal board medical issues and screening systems/time frames for all workers”.

Steve Smyth told Common Cause that the Union’s Steady Jobs campaign attracted a lot of discussion. “Delegates supported our action in fighting to secure permanent jobs and to stop the proliferation of contracting and labour hire practices. Simply put, coal industry workers are entitled to Steady Jobs and contract labour should only be used to supplement permanent workers not to replace them”.

The Convention also dealt with the issue of mine closures and operations also put on care and maintenance. “Delegates supported a use it or lose it policy on mining leases”, Steve Smyth told Common Cause.

“Too often we have seen coal companies shut up shop and sit on these valuable leases throwing mineworkers on the industrial scrapheap without any concern for their families or our communities. Our Delegates believe the Union should fight for mining lease durations to be reduced to a period of five years and that mining leases be terminated and be handed back immediately upon a company deciding to no longer mine (care and maintenance) or close operations”.

Steve Smyth said that Convention endorsed a wide range of Resolutions including absolute opposition to a move by a coalition of coal companies to cap Redundancy Pay and lower Accident Pay. “These are mercenary measures designed to rob Australian coal mineworkers of hundreds of millions in legitimate entitlements to further swell the coffers of the big mining companies. Convention made clear that we won’t cop that.”

The Queensland District President told Common Cause that the Convention helped clear the air and set the Union on its course over the coming years. “Facing daunting challenges is nothing new to our Union. We’ve been doing it for over 100 years now. But I’m confident that the present generation of members in our Union will live up to the challenges confronting us. We’ll fight for our rights at work, we’ll fight for our families and we’ll fight for our communities,” he said.
The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, Mining and Energy Division, Queensland District Branch (‘the District’) recently held an election for offices that correspond with offices of the Mining, Energy And Ports District of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy, Industrial Union of Employees, Queensland (‘the Qld District’). The District is the federal counterpart body of the Qld District.

To avoid holding two (2) elections for a corresponding office, the Union Secretary of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy, Industrial Union of Employees, Queensland will, at the request of the Qld District, make an application for exemption from holding an election under section 580 of the Industrial Relations Act 1999 (Qld). The application is being made so that the member who fills an office in the District will fill the corresponding office in the Qld District.

The members of Qld District will not be detrimentally affected as members have already voted, or been given the opportunity to vote, in the election held for the federal counterpart body.

This notice will apply to any vacant offices in the Qld District until the expiry of the term which commences in 2016, where the office in which the vacancy occurs (in the Qld District) corresponds with an office in the District, and where the District has held an election for its vacant office.

Notice to members of the mining, energy and ports district of the construction, forestry, mining and energy, industrial union of employees, Queensland

As the last issue of Common Cause went to press, the Queensland District votes were still to be declared in the Union’s election. The ballot was conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and when the results were declared the four senior Union officials, who were challenged, were all comfortably returned by the rank and file.

Stephen Smyth was re-elected as District President for the next four years while Tim Whyte was returned as District Secretary. Mitch Hughes won the position as the District’s Senior Vice-President and Steve Pierce is back as a District Vice-President.

Each of the returned officials Common Cause spoke to expressed their gratitude for the ongoing support and confidence the rank and file have shown in them to lead the Union over the next four years.

“We are in challenging times and it has never been more important that we stick together”, Stephen Smyth told Common Cause. “We are moved by the level of support the rank and file has shown in us and determined to continue to do all we can to live up to their confidence in us. We know our responsibilities as leaders in a great rank and file Union like ours and we won’t let our members down”, he said. “We’ll work hard every day to repay our members trust in us”.

Returned senior officials. From left are Tim Whyte, Secretary; Stephen Smyth, President; and Mitch Hughes, Senior Vice-President.

Returned District Vice-President Steve Pierce.

Queensland leaders all returned in AEC ballot

COMMON CAUSE
Our Hail Creek Lodge was established in May 2016 within a mine site of one of the most anti-collectivism global behemoths that is Rio Tinto. Aware of the proud traditions and the legacy we inherit from previous generations of miners, we now proudly carry the torch forward, learning from the past and being progressive and creative in our approach.

We are very proud of our Lodge’s achievements to date that include:

- Challenging the company and ultimately stopping the practice of applying an artificial ceiling of 3-days per year to our sick leave entitlements via their Work Performance Review policies and practices.
- Successfully challenging the company on a change of interpretation of our generous Personal Leave clause through a Federal Court win after an initial appeal.
- Challenging the company on an attempt to reduce our pay by reducing our working hours despite being on a salary (currently heading off to Court).
- Successfully campaigning against the introduction of so-called Smart Caps due to the companies refusal to address our concerns.

These are some of our achievements to date working collectively through the Union and in particular with great mentors in the Mackay Office. However, in my opinion, the most impressive achievement is the effectiveness with which our Lodge Officials have managed to organise this workforce against the odds.

Hail Creek Lodge members deserve the best and our Lodge leadership strives to provide it for them. We are fortunate to have such a wonderful, selfless and committed group of individuals from all walks of life who have a real passion for Union values and principles and for standing up for their mates. Serving a rank and file that is determined to fight for a Fair Go against one of the most powerful multinational mining companies in the world, it is a great combination.

In the Hail Creek Lodge logo I have represented solidarity and integrity in the grouping of the people in the centre circle; they stand together in solidarity and are united as an important force in the industry.

Strength is also seen in the grouping of the people, as we are stronger when united, and also in the hands gripped in a strong embrace as if helping the other person up (I chose this grip as opposed to a handshake, as handshakes can be somewhat corporate and ‘deal making’ rather than a strong helping hand).

Family and fairness are shown in the representation of both female and male figures that can be wives, husbands, mothers and fathers providing for their families.

The outer circles are not only a place to hold the Lodge’s name and catchcry but also encircle the image in a feeling of community; I see circles as embracing and strong shapes. And finally, the Union’s catchcry: ‘United we stand, divided we fall’ embodies all of the above as a whole.

The logo also symbolises our diversity and recognises the traditional custodians of the land on which we work.

Hail Creek – Queensland’s newest Lodge – building on our Union’s proud traditions

By Cesar Trigo, Lodge President

What the Hail Creek Lodge logo symbolises

By Amber Moore

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Strength is also seen in the grouping of the people, as we are stronger when united, and also in the hands gripped in a strong embrace as if helping the other person up (I chose this grip as opposed to a handshake, as handshakes can be somewhat corporate and ‘deal making’ rather than a strong helping hand).

Family and fairness are shown in the representation of both female and male figures that can be wives, husbands, mothers and fathers providing for their families.

The outer circles are not only a place to hold the Lodge’s name and catchcry but also encircle the image in a feeling of community; I see circles as embracing and strong shapes. And finally, the Union’s catchcry: ‘United we stand, divided we fall’ embodies all of the above as a whole.

The logo also symbolises our diversity and recognises the traditional custodians of the land on which we work.
On Friday 17th June 2016, The Mai-Wel Group was delighted to receive a $5,000 donation from the CFMEU Union members at Mt Thorley Warkworth Lodge.

Lodge Vice-President Mick Robbins, Secretary Russell Prescott and Executive Member Scott Baird met with Mai-Wel CEO Pennie Kearney. They toured the organisation’s Head Office and businesses located in Telarah where they presented the cheque, which is a portion of the funds raised by CFMEU Mt Thorley Warkworth members.

Around 530 CFMEU Lodge members make a regular donation each pay, totalling more than $28,000 per annum, which is then divided up amongst a variety of local charities selected by members. Other 2016 recipients include Ronald McDonald House, Canteen, Aspect Hunter and Sids and Kids.

This was the first time that The Mai-Wel Group, a Hunter based disability service provider, was selected as a recipient of the funds. “Being a local boy, I’ve always known Mai-Wel was around. It wasn’t until today that I learnt what actually happens there,” Lodge Secretary Russell Prescott said.

The Warkworth representatives toured the Head Office site which accommodates Mai-Wel’s corporate services team as well as PACE Setters, a timber manufacturing business specialising in outdoor furniture, pallets and crates and The Enterprise Centre, a confidential document destruction business. The two businesses employ approximately 60 people with a disability together with a small number of support staff.

“Our hope is that by giving back to our local community through charities such as The Mai-Wel Group, we can make a real difference in the lives of people within our community,” Russell said.

Mai-Wel CEO, Pennie Kearney, was delighted to receive the funds. “The $5,000 donated is a fantastic contribution and will be allocated to Creative Arts at The Hub, Maitland. Mai-Wel’s Creative Arts allows people with a disability and the wider community to engage their passion for creativity and provide an avenue for self-awareness, creative expression and community inclusion through participation in singing, dancing, drama, performance, arts and craft. “What’s most special about this donation is that it is made by people in the Hunter, for people in the Hunter. Members of the Mt Thorley Warkworth CFMEU can rest assured their hard earned money will be used to advance the lives of people with a disability,” Pennie said.

The Mai-Wel Group has a 55-year history of providing opportunity and choice to people with a disability or disadvantage. Employing more than 300 staff across the company and 100 people with a disability within three businesses, the organisation is a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider and champions individual decision making and choice for the people they support in their working life, living options and lifestyle and leisure opportunities.
Our Union’s Goonyella Riverside and Peak Downs Lodges play a vital role in supporting the Moranbah community in Central Queensland. As part of their commitment to the local community, the Lodges contribute to a fund that has provided over a million dollars in scholarships to assist young local students to move on to a University education.

Here, Holly Lewiston, a member of our Union’s Peak Downs Lodge, expresses her family’s appreciation for the support of her brother Dakkota, who is well on his way to realising his ambition to become a ‘brain surgeon’.

Three years ago, my brother Dakkota McConnell told me about his application for the extremely generous Moranbah Trust Fund Scholarship primarily supported by the CFMEU Peak Downs and Goonyella Riverside Lodges. There is also monetary assistance to the fund from the AMWU Goonyella Riverside, ETU Peak Downs and the Isaac Regional Council.

As he continued on through the selection process, we were excited at the prospect of him being awarded this scholarship which I knew would help him greatly to achieve his best at university, especially moving away from home to do so. When we received the call to say he had been awarded the scholarship, the entire family was ecstatic and extremely proud, not only of Dakkota for getting through the selection process, but also of our community which comes together to support its members in ways such as this.

Dakkota has always been driven academically, even from a young age when he declared that he wanted to be a neurosurgeon. He is now well on his way toward that goal in his studies, achieving in the top 5% of the University academically, and being accepted into the prestigious Griffith University Honours College, as well as the International Honours Society known as Golden Key.

The support of the Moranbah Community Trust Fund Scholarship has allowed Dakkota to achieve these successes, and my entire family is extremely grateful for helping Dakkota to continue toward his aspiration of becoming a neurosurgeon. In Dakkota’s words:

“...I cannot thank the Moranbah Community Trust Fund Scholarship contributors enough for the financial support I have received over the course of my Biomedical Science degree. I know that without this support, I would not have been able to achieve what I have so far, and I am so proud to be a part of the Moranbah community, which supports and cares for all of its members so deeply.”

I, myself, am so thankful to the CFMEU rank and file, with their dedication and emphasis on unity, and am proud to call myself a member of the CFMEU Peak Downs Lodge. Thank you to all of the companies and businesses who contribute to the Moranbah Community Trust Fund Scholarship, and thank you to the CFMEU for their contribution to the Moranbah community; United We Stand, Divided We Fall.
West Wallsend No.2’s closure brings down the curtain on a proud Union Lodge

When the last shift finished mining coal at the West Wallsend No.2 Colliery on 7 July this year, in the words of our Northern District President Peter Jordan: “It brought down the curtain on one of our finest Union Lodges with a record of service to our members that was second to none”.

Common Cause was privileged to attend the final BBQ at West Wallsend No.2 that day and bid a fond farewell to some of the mineworkers who contributed so much in fighting for and protecting the interests of all Union members.

Since West Wallsend No.2 began mining in 1969, the Union Lodge has always played a great role in the District’s activities. The bulk of the workforce was drawn from local towns around Lake Macquarie, Cessnock and Kurri Kurri. Many came from previous generations of miners who had connections in the area right back to when coal mining first started around West Wallsend in the late 1880s, when the first colliery was developed there.

Since then, West Wallsend No.2 mineworkers have always been an integral part of the local community, striking levies to support many groups, causes and services vital to local residents. It is the strong local community and family ties that helped bind the West Wallsend No.2 mineworkers together so tightly, Lodge Secretary Daryl Haile told Common Cause.

Daryl started at West Wallsend No.2 in 1988 and for the past 10-years has been Lodge Secretary. He has also served as a District Board of Management member and a Central Councillor. Jimmy Heaton is the Lodge President who was also a past District Board of Management member, Simon Shields, a fourth generation Northern District coal miner, is Vice-President and John Reid is the Assistant Secretary.

“Fortunately, we’ve had a strong and committed membership that was prepared to fight and stand together for our rights and conditions. Our Lodge officials have always worked well together and never lost sight of why we were there and that’s simply to represent our rank and file in the best possible way. That’s got us through some tough times, particularly in the WorkChoices era and at EBA bargaining times”.

Both Simon and Daryl said that the Lodge was proud of the fact that they held on to shift and gate seniority at the mine as well as shower time, conditions that were continually under attack in more recent years.

Assistant Secretary John Reid told Common Cause that before the wind down of West Wallsend No.2, the Lodge had about 160 members.

“I’m very proud of not only the service we’ve given the rank and file on the job but also the contribution we’ve made to the community through regular donations”, he said.

“Yes, we’ve had several changes of ownership at West Wallsend No.2,” Daryl told Common Cause, “the latest being Glencore who were Xstrata before that. One thing that hardly ever changed though was the arrogant attitude of management. Nothing was ever good enough for them and everything we fought for was always too much for them”.

Simon Shields agreed: “Fortunately, we’ve had a strong and committed membership that was prepared to fight and stand together for our rights and conditions. Our Lodge officials have always worked well together and never lost sight of why we were there and that’s simply to represent our rank and file in the best possible way. That’s got us through some tough times, particularly in the WorkChoices era and at EBA bargaining times”.

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“I’m very proud of not only the service we’ve given the rank and file on the job but also the contribution we’ve made to the community through regular donations”, he said.

“In return, whenever we have needed community support the local people have been there for us. We’ve never
Simon Shields laying a wreath for the two miners killed during the life of the West Wallsend No.2 mine, Alan Lynch and Colin Maughan.

Colin Maughan was killed in a road accident in 2001 on his way to work, just a few hundred metres outside the mine entrance. There is a Memorial at the pit and in a moving ceremony before it closed, the West Wallsend No.2 miners laid a wreath and honoured their memories with a sombre silence.

Then, as all proud coal miners do, they packed up their gear and shook hands with workmates before adjourning to a local club to share more West Wallsend No.2 memories over a few beers.

The final words go to District President Peter Jordan: “The West Wallsend No.2 Lodge typifies all that is best in our Union. They never let their mates, families or community down. They never left anyone half-way or anything half-done. They are the salt of the earth who proudly lived up to the wonderful history and legacy previous generations of coal mineworkers built this Union on”.

Sad loss of Mabel Comerford

The wonderful Mabel Comerford passed away peacefully on the 29 August at the grand old age of 99. Mabel was married to Northern District miners legend Jim Comerford for more than 70 years. Jim passed away in 2006, aged 93.

Mabel Comerford was the last link to that incredible generation of the Hunter coal community who endured the hardships of the 15-month long 1929-30 Northern District Lockout of 10,000 men and boys.

Along with Jim, Mabel also experienced the deprivations of the Great Depression and was a stalwart by Jim’s side in the rebuilding of the Miners Federation in the 1930s and throughout his term as acting General Secretary of the Union during the 1949 National Coal Strike when some of our leaders were jailed.

Jim went on to become Northern District President of the Miners Federation and also General Secretary of the Union. With Mabel’s support and encouragement Jim was a prolific writer publishing two outstanding books on the history of mineworkers – Coal and Colonials, the founding of the Australian coal mining industry; and Lockout, an eyewitness account of Australia’s most violent industrial conflict.

Throughout her life, Mabel has been a beloved stalwart of our Union and our community. For those of us privileged to know her, Mabel was an inspiration. She lived a long and full life but she will be missed, especially by her daughter Jean, son-in-law Tony, her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Vale Mabel Comerford.
When the 178-strong Australian Paralympic Team proudly emerged to take part in the 2016 Olympics in Rio, the youngest member was 13-year old Tamsin Colley, a talented and determined track and field athlete and youngest daughter of our Union’s National Research Director Peter Colley.

For those of us in the National Office who have followed Tamsin’s athletic progress since she first started competing in 2009, her emergence as a champion competitor is no surprise but her rapid elevation to the ranks of Paralympian at such a young age is a phenomenal feat.

Peter told Common Cause that Tamsin narrowly missed out on the original athletics team picked for the Rio Paralympics and that the family had set their sights on Tokyo in 2020 when she will still be a teenager.

“The suspension of the Russian Paralympic team opened up more slots for world qualified athletes and Tamsin was one of nine additional members allocated to the Australian team. It was a wonderful surprise but it meant that Tamsin and the other eight had a bit more work to do to catch up with those athletes already in the pre-games acclimatisation and final training camp in Florida, USA.”

As Common Cause goes to press, Tamsin will be competing in the women’s 200m in the T36 – mild cerebral palsy – category. Her current world ranking in this event was 8th but is now 7th with the Russians not competing.

Given the short notice, Peter remained in Sydney to look after the family while Mum, Cathie, went to Rio with Tamsin.

Whatever the outcome of the 2016 Paralympics, Tamsin and all the other members of the team are champions because they are a rare breed who have earned the title of Paralympians who have represented Australia.

Congratulations to Tamsin and to Peter, Cathie and sister Shannon who have supported her throughout her already distinguished athletic career.

At just 13-years of age, Tamsin Colley now a proud Australian Paralympian

Colouring-in Winners

Congratulations to the following winners of the Winter 2016 colouring-in competition who each receive a special prize:

- Jimmy Thomson 10 New South Wales
- Abbie Hemsworth 12 New South Wales
- Amelia Phillips 4 New South Wales
- Nikita Kidd 12 South Australia
- Amelia Mason 8 Tasmania
- Roy Itzstein 5 Queensland
- Rushyan McSorley 8 New South Wales
- Brianna Birkinshaw 5 Western Australia
- Ivy Neve 10 Queensland
- Maddison Day 8 Queensland
- Jack Selmes-Hopper 10 Queensland
Anna Meares – Australian Olympic legend and proud coal miner’s daughter

From Australia’s national team flag-bearer at the Rio Olympics, to emerging as the only Australian athlete to win four individual medals at four Olympic Games, Anna Meares has always carried herself proudly as a coal miner’s daughter.

Anna grew up in the Central Queensland coal mining community of Middlemount. Her father Tony Meares worked at Central Colliery where he was our Union’s Lodge Secretary and a member of our Queensland District Board of Management.

It was in Middlemount in the mid-1990s that Anna and her older sister Kerrie first emerged as budding Australian champion cyclists going on to win a swag of junior Australian titles and set many records. Throughout their triumphs, Anna and Kerrie have always acknowledged their connection with our coal mining communities.

In a feature article on Anna in The Australian just after she was named as the flag-bearer for the Australian team in Rio, Anna revealed that at 20, when she set off for her first Olympics in Athens in 2004, her Dad Tony had presented her with a gift that she unwrapped in the athletes village. Expecting it was a piece of good luck jewellery it turned out instead to be a piece of white material with black edging that simply said: “I’m a Coal Country Kid and I’m Proud to be a Coal Miner’s Daughter”.

Driven by the grit and determination that made her a world champion, Anna worked hard to not only recover but to go on and win a silver medal in Beijing – the only medal the Australian cycling team won at those Olympics.

Four years later in London in 2012, Anna added another Olympic gold medal to her swag of honours and of course this year she had the great honour of leading Australia’s Olympic team in Rio.

In addition to her legendary Olympic record, Anna has won a further four Commonwealth Games gold medals and added a staggering nine more world championship success. In 2011, Anna became the first cyclist to become a world champion in every track cycling discipline.

Those who know Anna closely describe her as humble and caring. For the rest of us, she remains an inspiration and a credit to her family and her community. Anna Meares represents all that has ever been best in a coal miner’s daughter.
Luke van der Meulen bows out after decades of dedicated leadership

One of our Union’s most distinguished leaders, Victorian Mining and Energy District President Luke van der Meulen, has retired after decades of dedicated service to our members and the broader Latrobe Valley community.

Luke came to Australia as a five-year-old with his family from the Netherlands in 1956. He is proud of his family’s history. His maternal grandfather was an active unionist who risked his life to help hide Jews from the Germans during WW11. His paternal grandfather was a butcher who was gaoled by the Nazis for a number of years when he was caught giving out more meat than the mandatory ration quota allowed during the Second World War.

“There is a very strong thread of moral and community ethics that runs through both sides of the family which I hope to have inherited,” Luke told Common Cause.

Luke not only inherited a strong moral fibre but an impressive work ethic that saw him take on many jobs as a kid before starting as an apprentice boilermaker at Yallourn in 1969. This was the start of a working life that took him in and out of the Latrobe Valley and as far away as Bougainville in Papua New Guinea for a few years. There, Luke and his wife Jenny started their young family and returned to the Latrobe Valley to settle down in the early 1980s.

In January 1986 Luke went back to work with the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) as a Grade 1 Operator and was to work his way through the ranks to the top before sacrificing a much higher paid job to take on the responsibilities of a full-time Union official.

From the time he re-entered the SECV ranks Luke became a committed Union activist and his leadership potential marked him as someone special. He became FEDFA Sub Branch Secretary in October 1989 as the drive for privatisation of the power industry started.

It was also the era of Union ‘rationalisation’ that was to radically change the face of trade union organisation and structures in Australia. For his part Luke was an uncompromising activist who believed that a Union was only as strong as its rank and file was willing and engaged to fight.

As the FEDFA merged into the CFMEU and the Latrobe Valley workers formed the basis of our Mining and Energy Division’s Victorian District, Luke became our first District President. Until his retirement in July this year, Luke remained as President of our Victorian Mining and Energy District, a member of the National CFMEU Executive across all Divisions as well as Victorian President of the CFMEU.

It is impossible to separate Luke’s family from his role as a Union leader. His wife Jenny, daughters Kieta and Tia and son Lee have been with him at the centre of some of the biggest and most bitterly fought disputes against privatisation, job losses, for rights at work and in lengthy strikes and lockouts and they have never faltered. Many of the earlier Union campaigns were run out of their house in Moe.

Luke and Jenny and their family have not only been to the fore in industrial activity but in their community too.

Luke was a fire fighter for a number of years along with his daughter Tia. During Victoria’s Black Saturday fires both were on the front line from the day it started as a fire storm that shocked the nation with the huge loss of life and damage it caused and he remained fighting the fire for the remainder of the month until it was officially out.

Recognising Luke’s bravery and commitment, our Union’s Central Council contributed $250,000 on behalf of our members to assist the victims of the fire and to support local fire brigades.

Now it’s time for Luke and Jenny to share some well deserved extra quality time together with the family and to pursue their passion for travelling in Australia and overseas.

Luke is also looking forward to more time for playing golf, motorbike riding, photography and become more involved in Gippsland FM’s community radio.

“It has been a privilege to know so many good people and to have stood alongside them in testing times. I’ve been lucky to be part of a great Union, a great community and to have a wonderful family that has always stuck together through thick and thin. I have no regrets and would do it all again in a heartbeat,” Luke told Common Cause.
Union pays tribute to one of our true pioneers with the retirement of Lorraine Usher

By General President Tony Maher

I’ve had the privilege of knowing Lorraine Usher since she started with the FEDFA in February 1986. Not many officials have traversed the range of roles in the Union that Lorraine has. She has been a Counter Organiser (sort of like the complaints department/trouble-shooter), Office Manager, Organiser, District Secretary and General Vice-President.

Throughout her entire Union life Lorraine developed a reputation for never backing down and members were drawn to her fighting instincts. From bitter and protracted disputes with Shell, Qenos, Basell or any other employers in the power industry, Lorraines forged her reputation as a tough and determined Union leader fighting for the rights of our members.

When it came to the privatisation of the NSW power industry, Lorraine together with Allen Drew, during 1995-1997 took on the NSW Labor Government, the Labor Council and even other unions and won. In 2000, privatisation was resurrected and with Lorraine and Allen at our Union’s helm, we won again.

This was an enormous achievement and Lorraine as the Sydney based official was in the thick of it as the crucial political meetings occurred in Sydney. Every dirty trick in the book was used in the campaign to sell off our electricity assets. They tried everything including physical intimidation and that just made her stronger and more determined.

As District Secretary Lorraine got exposed to the world of finance and compliance with regulators and got a small and underfunded District through 20 years without losing money.

In 2013 Lorraine and Allen Drew made the farsighted decision to merge their District with the Northern District. I know many of the Energy District delegates and they tell me they love their new District every bit as much as they loved their old District. It was the right move made for the right reasons and no one has ever looked back.

Part of the merger agreement was that Lorraine moved to the National Office to become a General Vice-President. It came at a time of great upheaval in the Energy sector with the massive challenge of ever changing climate change policies, major bargaining disputes and further privatisation.

As the General President I’m able to say that I don’t know how we would have handled those challenges without Lorraine. She never turned down a challenge and never shirked a task no matter how difficult.

Now you couldn’t speak about Lorraine’s Union career without dealing with her many ‘firsts’. She was the first female official in the FEDFA and the first woman CFMEU District official. She was also the first woman on our Union’s Central Council and the first female General Vice-President in our Union’s history.

Lorraine is also a foundation member of Emily’s List, a progressive Australian network that advances the role of women in leadership. She is Secretary of the CFMEU Women’s Committee and a key player in Women in Male Dominated Organisations and Industries (WIMDOI).

Lorraine has represented our Union at the ACTU Executive, Unions NSW Executive and the Women’s Committee of IndustriALL, our global trade union federation.

In fact she is a highly regarded figure in international trade union circles. Many times I’ve witnessed her coaching and mentoring women, particularly younger women, from around the world. Clearly she’s an inspiration for them.

For such a stellar career, in 2013 the ACTU presented Lorraine with the Jenny George Award for outstanding contributions to women’s advancement in unions. Most recently Lorraine, with her fellow activists on the CFMEU Women’s Committee, drove through a rule change for affirmative action positions on the CFMEU National Executive. Affirmative Action in unions, particularly in our Union, will be the lasting legacy for this humble but determined woman.

Lorraine’s been a true pioneer in the best traditions of our proud Union and her contribution is a lasting legacy for all today and into the future. It has been an honour for me to serve with Lorraine.
Earlier this year, one of our Southern District’s veteran activists Gavin Hamilton celebrated his 90th birthday. Former Miners Federation General Secretary Barry Swan and legendary retired miner Fred Moore were among those who joined Gavin to celebrate. Here, Barry pays tribute to Gavin and his role in the world’s first underground coal mine work-in.

While our Union has a long and proud history of fighting mine closures and lockouts through militant action such as stay-down strikes, it wasn’t until the 8th of May 1972 that coal mineworkers set a new historic course through the take-over and work-in of a colliery at the South Clifton mine, in the NSW Southern District.

It was a courageous and inspiring move that forged the way less than three years later for the Nymboida mineworkers to work in and take over of that mine in the NSW Northern District. Among the pioneering South Clifton mineworkers was Gavin Hamilton, one of the key players in the take-over of the mine. So, on Gavin’s 90th surprise birthday function a number of us had the privilege of listening to and sharing Gavin’s memories to that historic period.

The South Clifton mine was situated at Wombarra, 20 kms from Wollongong. It was operated by Clutha Development and owned by US billionaire tycoon Daniel K. Ludwig. The mine’s entire production was exported to Italy.

In early 1972, the South Clifton workers were informed that another US company, Utah Mining Australia, had negotiated a cut-price contract with South Clifton’s Italian buyer. As a consequence, Clutha would close South Clifton and with the exception of a small number of employees it required to retrieve equipment and then seal off the mine, the remaining 300 employees would be dismissed.

Despite the best efforts of the Miners Federation with the support of the people of the Illawarra region, Clutha Development refused to reconsider that decision and issued the notices, effective Friday May 5th 1972. On Monday morning, May 8th, the South Clifton workers defied the notices and turned up for work. National and District officials attended the pit top. It was then discovered that during the weekend Clutha management had locked off the electricity supply to the underground workings.

A pit top meeting was held with a unanimous decision made that the South Clifton workforce would assume operational control of the mine! Meanwhile, as the media were interviewing Lodge, District and National Miners Federation officials about the practicality of the workers assuming control of the mine, several of the workers quietly set about resolving the problem posed by the industrial grade padlock preventing access to the mains power box. Without access to that power box, operational control of the mine by the South Clifton workers was a Mission Impossible! Power was needed to restore the ventilation systems and to the machinery required for production. A bolt cutter soon addressed the padlock problem.

For 44-years, the identity of who wielded the bolt cutters that day has remained a well-kept secret. However, it would not be unreasonable to suspect that Gavin Hamilton would have been in very close proximity when the bolt cutter did the job!

The South Clifton work-in lasted for three-days before Clutha came to terms that included withdrawal of dismissal notices and all mineworkers to be retained for another couple of months on dismantling and other work. Clutha also agreed to provide preference of employment for job vacancies at its many other mines and the Joint Coal Board agreed to place workers at other mines. Clutha also agreed to surrender or transfer its mine lease if someone else was prepared to operate it. This subsequently happened with all South Clifton mineworkers who wanted to return re-employed at the mine.

In his book, Miners in the 1970s, former Common Cause editor Pete Thomas wrote: “Those three days of May 8, 9 and 10, 1972, at South Clifton wrote an indelible page in mineworkers history. The South Clifton action was something unique and inspiring. It provided a genesis for future radical actions. ”

At the age of 90-years, Gavin Hamilton retains all of the tenacity, vision and clear thinking that he displayed at the South Clifton work-in all those years ago. He remains as committed and loyal to his mine site workmates and indeed to the values and principles of the Miners Federation that are a feature of the CFMEU today.

Gavin has enjoyed the close friendship and the respect of many of the Miners Federation’s leaders, including former General Presidents Bill Parkinson, Evan Phillips and Bob Kelly. It is people like Gavin Hamilton and his fellow South Clifton workers that have helped make the Union what it is today.
Virtual Tour of Illawarra’s Mining History

By Graham Pryor*

This Virtual Tour allows us to visit historical mine sites without leaving the comfort of our home. The Illawarra Heritage Trail website has been established and everyone who is interested in Australia’s mining history is invited to take the Virtual Tour. Best of all, there is no cost – it is absolutely free.

The list of sites available includes Mount Keira (Kemira) Colliery, Miners Tribute, Bulli Miners Cottage, Bulli Mine memorial where an underground explosion in 1887 killed 81 men and boys, Corrimal and Coal Cliff Coke works, Jetty Mine and Coal Cliff Colliery, Hicks Point Jetty, Mount Kembla Colliery where an explosion in 1902 killed 96 men and boys working underground, Dapto Smelter, Pioneer Kerosene Works and Longwall mining roof support.

Expansion of the website with additional historical sites has commenced with sponsorship from the Community Partners Fund of BlueScope Steel and the WIN Television Network.

The Illawarra Heritage Trail seeks to preserve the history of our early industries in Australia for future generations. It provides a journey into our past. Many viewers may choose to visit some of the actual sites after taking the Virtual Tour.

Early Mining History in the Illawarra

The first coal mine in the Wollongong area opened on Mount Keira in 1849. After this first commercially successful colliery was established, many coal mines were opened along the seaboard to the north of Mount Keira. To transport coal to their customers, some of the collieries constructed sea jetties where ships were loaded. Coal was shipped to the other colonies at Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart and shipped to other countries including China. Tramways were constructed from the mines to the jetties and skips loaded with coal were towed along the tramway by horses. At the jetty, the coal was loaded into a ship.

The ships transporting coal were called colliers. The early colliers were sailing ships and in later years they were powered by a combination of steam and sail.

Completed in 1888, the Government Railway constructed a rail line between Sydney and Wollongong that provided safe reliable transport to the Sydney market. By the turn of the 19th century a total of 12 mines employing 2,300 men were operating in an area along the coastline from Mount Kembla in the south to Balmain in the north. In 1907 there were 10 coke-making plants operating in Illawarra.

There was an increasing market for coal to fuel the steam-powered ships carrying cargo and immigrants to the NSW colony and an increasing demand for coal to provide steam power in industrial applications. The mining communities suffered hardships that included the devastating Bulli Mine Disaster in 1887 when 81 men and boys lost their lives, only to be followed in 1902 with an explosion at the Mount Kembla Mine where 96 men and boys were killed.

Throughout the years major improvements have been made in an industry that began by mining with a pick and fork and later a pick and shovel, hand boring of the coal face, explosives requiring an open flame fuse to ignite the explosive charge, open flame head lamps, cloth head caps, wooden roof bars and props for roof support. These were primitive implements used by the early coal miners, most of who came from Britain where mining had been practised for centuries.

The coal mining industry has made great progress in becoming a safer and healthier workplace. We should not forget how coal mining became established as an industry from humble beginnings. That is part of Australia’s history.

* Graham Pryor is a retired coal miner who worked in numerous collieries in the NSW coalfields. He is Secretary of the Mineral Heritage Subcommittee that created the Illawarra Heritage Trail.
We’re there when you need us

Supporting miners and the wider community is at the core of what we do. We’re proud of our long history of helping members for the best retirement outcomes. Our doors are always open and we can help you grow through life.

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The Ballad of Kemira

As told to Fred Love, by the Phantom Poet, South Clifton Colliery.

Thirty-one miners dug in underground,
And Prime Minister Fraser cannot be found.
The men get support from all over Australia,
But the Government’s weak and Fraser’s a failure.

BHP said, you’re getting the sack,
Go down the hill, we don’t want you back.
The men went in the pit and turned on their lights,
To fight for their jobs and all workers’ rights.

The wives and the loved ones attend every day,
To give them support for showing the way.
And hundreds of others turn up at the mine,
To make sure the company don’t get out of line.

And business people from far and from near,
Don’t go around thinking that you’re in the clear.
For if there’s no money to fill up your tills,
You’ll be in the same boat and taking the spills.

The steelworkers also are facing the sack,
Join together our forces and put BHP on the rack.
We must take some action for jobs we all need,
And stop this big company robbing Australia for greed.

So workers of Wollongong we must all unite,
Back up thirty-one miners for showing some fight.
We’ve got your back
Lawyers helping Mineworkers and their families since 1893

Benefits for CFMEU Mining and Energy Members:
+ Initial obligation-free consultation with a lawyer
+ A Free Standard Will for member and their partner*
+ 25% off Fixed Fee Conveyancing when buying or selling a property*
+ 10% off Family Law Fixed Fees*
+ All other services at a discounted rate

Our services include:
+ Fixed Fees for Family Law
+ Employment Claims
+ Insurance Claims
+ Compensation Claims
+ Criminal Law
+ Superannuation Claims
+ Fixed Fees for Conveyancing
+ Medical Law
+ Wills and Estates
+ Commercial Litigation

*Conditions apply. Standard Wills may not be suitable for all estate types. Fixed Fees excludes disbursements which are charged at cost. See slatergordon.com.au for details.

GET IN TOUCH
For a referral to Slater and Gordon freecall our Newcastle office on 1800 991 394
slatergordon.com.au

Slater and Gordon office locations:
Albury, Ashfield, Broken Hill, Campbelltown, Cessnock, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Gosford, Liverpool, Newcastle, Nowra, Parramatta, Sydney, Tamworth, Tweed Heads, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong

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Stop paying thousands on your existing high interest rate credit card.

7.99% p.a. 6 month introductory rate

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- Up to 55 days interest FREE on purchases
- Low ongoing rate of 10.12% p.a.
- No annual fee for the 1st year

Call **1300 36 2000**, visit a branch or go online [mmpcu.com.au](http://mmpcu.com.au)

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### SWITCH TO US AND SAVE*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Other Credit Card</th>
<th>MMPCU Low Rate Visa Card</th>
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<td>Interest paid p.a.</td>
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<td>$565</td>
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Amount you could save over one year by switching to us **$524**

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*Interest rates correct as at 22/08/2016 and subject to change without notice. Eligibility criteria, fees & charges, terms & conditions apply. Visit mmpcu.com.au or call 1300 36 2000 for more information. *Savings are based on when you make only the minimum monthly repayment of 2% per month and no other transactions are made on the credit card account. All figures are illustrative only and exclude credit card fees and charge. Collie Miners Credit Union is a division of Maritime, Mining & Power Credit Union Ltd. ABN 11 087 650 315 AFSL/Australian Credit licence 240399.*