

Opinion Piece by Arthur Rorris, Secretary South Coast Labour Council.

Published in the Illawarra Mercury 30 September 2019.

The kids protesting climate inaction in the streets of Wollongong recently are our kids. Many of them are the sons and daughters and grandchildren of steelworkers and miners. They are not naive and they haven't been brainwashed. They are angry and anxious because our Government and vested interests are stealing their future. Their rising anger is a new force in politics.

Young students around the world are calling for real solutions. In Wollongong we have a solution ready to go, putting our steelmaking capability to work building wind turbines and other systems for renewable energy.

Australia will need 10-15,000 MW of wind power capacity to be added to the energy-mix in coming years. This equates to thousands of wind turbines and around 1.5 million tons of steel. That's half of Port Kembla's annual steel production to satisfy one form of renewable technology demand. And that is just for the domestic market.

Our region is geared to make big things. From the ESSO pipelines to Harbour tunnels - all made in Port Kembla. We build the big things. Maybe that is why we dream the big things too. Our miners digging coal to make the finest quality steel in our steelworks. The steel locally engineered to build wind turbines for the future. Our ports and rail network to deliver that right across the country and across the world.

Our Universities and TAFE have skilled up hundreds of thousands of workers over decades in metals, electrical, mining, civil and other trades and technologies. Our workers have the skills needed to get the job done. The big question is whether Australian workers will have the opportunity to forge this change in production or will it fly out overseas like so many other manufacturing jobs?

In 2015 our steelworkers made great personal sacrifices to save the Australian Steel Industry and to spare our region from economic depression. It would be a slap in the face for our steelworkers and our miners if Scott Morrison does not take action to secure these jobs for Australian workers and looks the other way while these massive projects are completed with imported steel, fabrication and engineering.

This week marks 10 years since the release of the *Green Jobs Illawarra Action Plan*. NSW Premier Nathan Rees, Local Government, Wollongong University, TAFE and unions all backed it. But nothing has happened. Our industrial capacity and the challenge of climate change is still there but the political will has disappeared and with it the investment and policy backing needed to make the plan a reality.

So as a community we are borrowing a line from our kids - we are not asking for action we are demanding it. We say to the Australian and NSW Governments - let Wollongong and its workers do the job they have always done. Let us dig and forge and build the big things. The big things for a decent future for us and our children. We have both a right and an obligation to do it. A future where we can point to a wind turbine anywhere in Australia, and say "we built that in Wollongong". It's simple. Back the plan and let's *Recharge the Illawarra*.

We want our children going to bed at night knowing the parents of are working to save the planet and to put food on the table. After all, they have a right to a decent future.

#Uniontown4ClimateAction