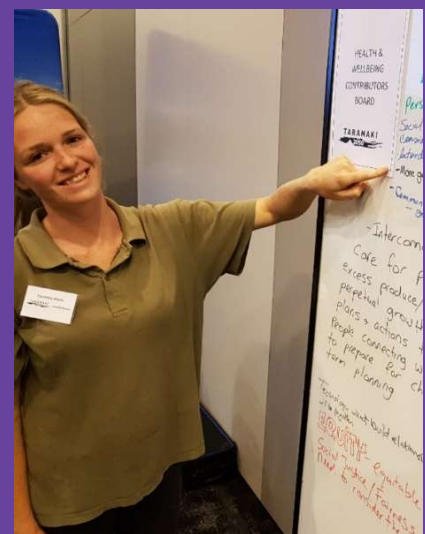


A just transition for Taranaki: views from workers and employers

A research project carried out with the support of the Industrial Relations Foundation

E tū union, June 2022
www.etu.nz/JustTransition



Executive summary

A just transition for workers' whose jobs are impacted by climate change (and technology, demographic changes and other trends) is a key focus for unions globally and New Zealand is no exception. As the International Trade Union Confederation puts it, there are no jobs on a dead planet. New Zealand unions are increasingly prioritising a focus on just transition to support their members through change¹.

There is little New Zealand research on workers' own expectations of a just transition, and this report attempts to begin to provide this worker voice for policy makers. The report presents insights into the experience of New Zealand workers in transition in the Taranaki region, in particular the interventions they and their employers would see as useful to support them to successfully move into new (or modified) work. The research was carried out through a phone survey of 100 workers in the Taranaki region, two focus groups of workers in the region, and five structured interviews with key employers locally.

We heard from workers that:

- Most don't feel well engaged by their employers around future skill development
- They felt there was a low level of preparedness for change
- If they needed to change job, 80% would try and stay in their industry and in a similar role
- To retrain, 55% preferred block courses, 38% preferred a small amount during work time during the week, and 7% preferred at their own time (eg night/off-shift classes)
- The cost of retraining should be spread across themselves, government and employers
- Over 80% were supportive of a social unemployment insurance scheme (which at the time of field work was a proposal being considered by social partners, and has now advanced to policy design)
- In terms of what a just transition would ideally look like for them, a structured redeployment scheme, supported retraining, income assistance and early retirement options (where applicable) ranked highest in terms of most preferred supports, followed by relocation assistance to leave the region and careers advice

	Definitely Like	Somewhat Like	Not need at all
Careers Advice	60%	21%	19%
Supported industry training/retraining	88%	9%	3%
Redeployment scheme	91%	7%	2%
Income assistance for a period of time	86%	15%	0%
Relocation and travel assistance if you need to leave the region	65%	22%	13%
Supported early retirement options in case of job loss	83%	12%	5%

In a follow up component of the research, we explored with workers and employers whether a redeployment scheme, as used in German and Australian transitions out of coal, could hold some value locally. We report on the outcomes of this research in this report also.

¹ See for example Parker, J, Alakavuklar, ON, Huggard, S. (2021). *Social movement unionism through radical democracy: The case of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions and climate change*. Industrial Relations Journal; 52: 270– 285. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irj.12330>

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Introduction and purpose

New Zealand faces potential major transition in employment and work brought on by technology, climate change, globalisation and population aging. While there is significant international research, there is very little New Zealand based work transition research. The purpose of this research was to gain specific localised insights into the experience of New Zealand workers in transition in the Taranaki region, in particular the interventions they and their employers would see as useful to support them to successfully move into new (or modified) work.

Ensuring that workers are supported during transition is a shared goal across government social partners, and specific tools, processes and policy interventions are needed to manage this. We are aware of international research on this topic, but very little is known (in recent times) of New Zealand workers' expectations and experiences of transition. Supporting displaced workers is a key focus for the Future of Work Tripartite Forum, and policy decisions on what interventions are useful for government and others to needs to be informed by the expressed needs of workers themselves. This research project was our attempt to begin to provide this worker voice.

Research methods

Fieldwork for this research was primarily carried out in the form of a phone survey of 100 workers (all members of E tū) in the Taranaki region, two focus groups of workers in the region, and five structured interviews with key employers locally in industries where E tū has membership. In the research, we let people know about how the information would be used, how to contact the primary researchers if they needed to view or correct any of the answers, and information on how E tū protects the privacy of information².

We received helpful guidance from staff and retired staff at the University of Waikato, and would like to acknowledge Gemma Piercy-Cameron, Bill Cochrane and Michael Law for their guidance, in particular in relation to the phone survey research methods. Any deficiencies in methods or conclusions reached are of course our own however.

² This research was covered by the Privacy Policy of E tū Incorporated, which is set out here <https://www.etu.nz/privacy-policy/>

Background and context

New Zealand's low level of support for workers in transition has been the subject of international commentary, most notably the OECD's 2017 *Back to Work: New Zealand* report on New Zealand's system for assisting displaced workers. The OECD report found New Zealand was among the weakest in the OECD for support for workers, where the costs of economic restructuring largely fall onto workers themselves. The report, using research from Dixon and Maré, noted income and wage effects upon displacement can be considerable even for those who successfully return to work (where workers' wages are generally 20 per cent lower than their prior job), and that the quality of work suffered (workers more likely to be in part time or non-permanent jobs than prior to displacement).³ OECD found the issue to be more pronounced in New Zealand than other OECD countries.

Rebuilding New Zealand's approach to Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) is a stated goal for government and was the subject of a chapter in the Welfare Expert Advisory Group report *Whakamana Tāngata*, and a focus of government since. As the Future of Work Tripartite Forum has recently noted⁴, existing government initiatives may collectively enhance the support for displaced workers and contribute to smoother employment transitions but there remain broader questions around long-term income adequacy and responding to larger-scale redundancies. It is hoped that this report will assist in further deliberations by the Forum and others on these matters.

The research also sought to gauge the views of workers on the appropriate balance between options to support a region versus an individual worker. The Productivity Commission⁵ noted that interventions that respond to the shock of the loss of a major employer in a region should focus on the labour market and skills needs of *individuals*, rather than of the needs of *regions*. The Commission noted a tension exists between regional needs and individual needs and so we asked workers their views on how to balance this.

Taranaki was chosen as the location for this research as E tū is a union that has been active locally in presenting workers' views on a just transition. Members of E tū were trained and supported to represent the union at a series of community meetings between February and April 2019 to design a Taranaki 2050 Roadmap, and the union has been involved in the follow up work designing concrete steps to help the region transition through a series of Transition Pathway Action Plans (such as the People and Talent pathway action plan)⁶. The union's senior official locally is represented on the both the Taranaki Regional Skills Leadership Group and, as Deputy Chair of 'm Deputy Chair of Ngā Kaiwhakatore o Taranaki, the region's combined governance of Tapuae Roa economic diversification & Taranaki 2050 just transition.

³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2017). *Back to Work: New Zealand, Improving the Re-employment Prospects of Displaced Workers*. Page 42. Available at https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/back-to-work-new-zealand_9789264264434-en#page1

⁴ Future of Work Tripartite Forum. (2019). *Strategic Assessment*. Page 13. Available at <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/future-work-tripartite-forum>

⁵ New Zealand Productivity Commission. (2018). *Low Emissions Economy: Final Report*. Page 288. Available at <https://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/lowemissions/>

⁶ The Roadmap and Action Plans are available at <https://www.taranaki.co.nz/vision-and-strategy/taranaki-2050-and-tapuae-roa/taranaki-2050/>

Views from workers

Quantitative survey

We spoke to 100 workers in the Taranaki region during 2020. The phone survey had 15 substantive questions followed by questions on demographic detail and participants' formal skills and qualifications. It initially asked respondents about their current career and progression pathways and the extent to which ongoing training was a feature at their work. It then asked about likely changes coming to their industry, and how well they thought their worksite was prepared, and for them personally, what preparation and protections they would have. They were then asked about what practical support they would be seeking when going through transition, and how training should be provided, which were the core questions of the research. Participants were also asked about social unemployment insurance, which at the time of the fieldwork was a proposal being considered by the Tripartite Future of Work Forum and has now progressed to formal policy design.

Current career and progression pathways

81% of workers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their jobs utilise their current skills fully in the roles that they have, with 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their jobs provide opportunities for them to improve upon their current skills and learn new ones.

There was a roughly even 50/50 split on whether workers had received any training in using new technologies or systems at their workplace in the last year. Some workers commented that this was mainly due to there being no new systems being introduced or invested in within their workplaces or within their respective departments, which limited their ability to access new training.

Whilst workers stated that they fully use their current skills and to a lesser degree can improve upon their skills and continue learning and training, the majority of workers identified that their employers do not engage well around employee's development: 32% stating that their employers don't engage at all and 50% feeling that their employers only engage a little. Workers relayed that personal development is very much individually driven and dependent on some workers pushing relentlessly for the opportunity to progress and access training and upskilling.

Workers would like more engagement from their employers around training and development opportunities so that they can remain relevant and attractive to their employers and any future work requirements or opportunities.



Prime Minister Ardern addresses E tū members shortly after the April 2018 announcement on future offshore oil and gas block offers

Changes to their industry

Workers knew that change may be coming to their industry or sector. When asked how much change to jobs in their industry that they expecting in the next 5 years through processes such as automation and digitalisation, 57% believed there would be some change and workers' core tasks may change, compared to just 25% who believed there would be little change to their jobs and their core tasks will remain steady. 18% said their jobs may not be there at all.

It was identified by participants that the level of preparedness amongst workers and their colleagues was still very low to help them combat those changes, with only 2% believing they were very prepared and 32% that they were somewhat prepared.

If workers needed to change job

Over 80% of survey participants stated that they would look for roles similar to their current one and/or look to stay in their current industry. These roles identified were process worker, truck driver, machine operator, forklift operator, warehousing and distribution work, and oil & gas industry work. If required some said they would also seek employment in roles such as labourer, construction, fencing, chemical handling, administration and office roles, customer service, IT work and night shift work which they deem suitable for their current skills and experience gained through employment.

Among these, 25% of participants indicated that they would fall back on their trade backgrounds if needed and would seek to gain employment in engineering, electrical, fabrication and automotive trades and mechanical maintenance opportunities. 7% would seek to progress in their current career pathways and stated they would apply for management careers in middle management or supervisory roles.

An interesting aspect was the 12% of workers surveyed that would seek career/employment opportunities in areas that they do not currently work in but would like to, such as kapahaka tutor, teaching roles, robotics, mechanical design, and community work. These roles would potentially utilise current skills gained through life and educational experience but would also require time and finances to upskill or retrain.

4% of participants indicated they would seek early retirement, 2% would like to own their own business and 2% would take anything they could get to remain gainfully employed.

Current protections they have

All of the survey participants were members of E tū union in the Taranaki region, and so this significantly skews the existing protections they have as compared to other non-unionised workers, noting that in 2020 only 16.42% of workers in New Zealand were union members⁷.

All but one worker surveyed had redundancy compensation in their employment agreement. 17% reported having retraining options while 83% did not. 28% reported having options for redeployment within the firm while 72% did not. More than 80% stated that they did not know of any other protections other than those three features prompted by the interviewer.

⁷ Registrar of Unions, Annual Returns Membership Reports. <https://www.companiesoffice.govt.nz/all-registers/registered-unions/annual-return-membership-reports/>.

Support they would seek when going through transition

Workers were asked what practical support they would be looking for if they found they needed to transition into new work. The table below sets out their responses.

	Definitely Like	Somewhat Like	Not need at all
Careers Advice	60%	21%	19%
Supported industry training/retraining	88%	9%	3%
Redeployment scheme	91%	7%	2%
Income assistance for a period of time	86%	15%	0%
Relocation and travel assistance if you need to leave the region	65%	22%	13%
Supported early retirement options in case of job loss	83%	12%	5%

Workers surveyed were also asked if there were any other things that they would want to see for themselves and colleagues in a just transition. Communication was identified as key, to enable advanced notice and planning from workers to ensure they are not unfairly affected by potential changes or transitioning requirements. The need for consultation and honest communication is the foundational requirement from workers so that they can be provided the full understanding of the changes that would take place and ensure a planning period for them to be able to recognise the effects and put in place sufficient support systems for themselves and their whānau.

Workers in the Taranaki region would like to see an increased investment in skills development for them to enable them to either stay in the region, gain qualifications on the job and provide a fair playing field for locals or to ensure their skills and experience are relevant for the jobs and opportunities that are out there. Industry training and re-training were raised as viable options provided a worker can maintain an income whilst taking up those opportunities to ensure no undue stress is placed on them and their families. For those employees that have indicated retirement, enabling opportunities such as reduced hours and job share options, and making use of their experience for mentoring and training capabilities, was raised.

For those workers that are affected by transitional change planning seminars that address areas of careers advice, regional job opportunities, budgeting and counselling services along with what supports workers could access that are relevant to their circumstances was identified as beneficial and would decrease the negative effects that could potentially occur for workers.

Training opportunities and related costs

Workers were asked about their preferred approach to retraining, should it be necessary.

Most workers (55%) expressed the desire for training to be able to be delivered in block courses, predominantly to make it easier to access and plan around hours and personal commitments and to ensure focus on delivery and outcomes without other distractions. 38% preferred to train during working hours by doing a small amount each week. With many having outside commitments with families, communities, and other jobs the anticipated uptake on training delivery outside of their normal working hours was quite low: 7% were in favour of doing a small amount each week in their own time (such as a night class).

Workers felt that the cost of training would need to be spread across a combination of areas: 80% suggested it be spread across themselves, their current and/or future employers and government when asked.

Some workers did express the willingness to take up training opportunities if they had to pay for it themselves: 28% said yes to this proposition, 28% said no and 44% said maybe. However, the ability to do this is limited and dependent on whether their earnings would be sufficient enough to be able to cover not only the cost of training but also the cost of taking time off work to complete if their personal commitments make it unsustainable to train during their off-work time.

There were many ideas expressed around how that could potentially happen, from government providing tax rebates to employers for training provisions delivered, future employers being able to bond employees for a certain period to ensure the benefits of the training supplied also benefits the company, to the ability of workers to be able to access their KiwiSaver to be able to take up training opportunities.



Social insurance

At the time of the research, the development of a social unemployment insurance scheme was under early consideration by social partners at the Future of Work Tripartite Forum⁸. When asked their view on a social unemployment insurance scheme, there was strong support. 83% believed it was a good idea, 3% not a good idea and 15% not sure.

Demographic summary of survey participants

	20-29 yrs	30-39 yrs	40-49 yrs	50-59 yrs	60+ yrs
AGE	16%	10%	29%	29%	16%

	Woman	Man	Non-binary	Prefer not say	Other
GENDER	10%	89%	-	1%	-

	New Zealand European	Māori	Pacific Islander	Other
ETHNICITY	81%	29%	5%	9%

(Replies total more than 100%; participants could answer with more than one)

Years of service with current employer

< 1 year	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	11-20 yrs	21-30 yrs	31-40 yrs	40+ yrs
3%	23%	21%	31%	14%	7%	1%

⁸ Discussion papers and other material relating to social unemployment insurance are available at the Forum's webpage here <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/employment-and-skills/future-of-work-tripartite-forum>. More recent information is now here <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/employment-and-skills/new-zealand-income-insurance-scheme/>

Hours worked per week

< 40 hours	40 hours	40-50 hours	50+ hours
2%	44%	49%	5%

Highest Qualification achieved

None	NCEA L1/2	NCEA L3/4	NZQA L1/2
5 participants	22 participants	5 participants	15 participants

NZQA L3/4	NZQA L5/6	Trade Qualified*	Degree/Diploma
9 participants	4 participants	20 participants	7 participants

* Trade Qualifications noted in the following areas: Electrical, Engineering, Mechanical, Automotive, Fabrication and Welding.

Skill Specific qualifications

Forklift	O/H Crane	ENCHAM	H&S	First Aid
9 participants	8 participants	5 participants	2 participants	1 participant

Qualitative focus groups

The first of these was held in person in New Plymouth in November 2020. Two further ones were scheduled in 2021 but had to be postponed due to alert level changes and so a zoom was held instead in February 2022, and the below covers comment at both events.

Comments in quotation marks are anonymised comments from members of the focus groups.

Discussion added depth to the results from the quantitative research but did not depart greatly from the overall themes.

In terms of changes coming to their industry, most reported this would be a feature to varying degree, with quite a lot of comment about longer serving workers (including those speaking for themselves at the sessions) for whom learning new skills may be a challenge.

“Older guys have been running boilers for 30 years, it’s harder to get to know the new technology.”

In terms of their current preparedness for change, many reported that they learn skills on the job for that current job, but there was little to no future skills and learning. Cost was seen as a reason for less than adequate training.

“Once they’ve got us in this place, it’s not developed further. I can’t really progress my skills.”

“Employers are reluctant because if you get the recognition and you’ve got the bit of paper, the easier and more likely it is you’ll go somewhere else. And they’ll have to pay you for those unit standards if you get them, it’s easier for them if you have the skills but they don’t have to pay for it.”

This wasn’t a universal view, as the following comments indicate:

“Our firm does actively encourage you to study as they need a certain level of skilled roles on each shift. They’re encouraging us to train up and they might have more than 1 panel operator on each shift as they want people to get these skills, so we have been a bit lucky. Some of its transferable, boiler tickets, confined spaces, health and safety, some of its plant specific.”

“Emergency training is quite good, all the systems for first aid and so on are in place. Steam tickets – but you have to work for it yourself, there’s no training department. If there was a bit more of a structure people would learn better.”

Longer serving staff spoke about when apprenticeships were cut back in the 1990s. One participant who had been at the company for 25 years spoke of how when he first started work, staff were paid for their skill levels, and it drove people to learn new skills. However, skill based pay rates went out the window years ago, he said.

Participants thought the energy process operator courses being run by Western Institute of Technology⁹ (presently transitioning to Te Pūkenga NZIST) were quite good, they gave a base of skills and then the plant specific skills were learnt on the job.

We then asked where people would turn to for assistance, if they needed to find new work. Work and Income, labour hire agencies, online job search were suggested. Other comments included a participant who would ring around the electrical companies and activate family networks to find work, and another comment from a participant that they would look at whatever was available – ‘tradie, barman, whatever’.

“The more variety of support the better in our industry – one type of support will not suit everybody – ability to mix and match, will lead to better outcomes.”

“Redeployment and training are top of the list for me.”

A key theme that came up at the focus groups was honest and open communication.

“Employers close ranks when something is coming up, they don’t want externals to know, want you to work right up to the last minute because they can’t afford you to leave early looking for other work. Therefore, you don’t get the time to look for other work and to plan.”

The above comment confirms and reinforces a key recommendation of the OECD’s *Back to Work: New Zealand* report on New Zealand’s system for assisting displaced workers, where they recommended New Zealand “strengthen employer responsibilities by providing a longer minimum notice period and a mandatory notification of each redundancy to trade unions (if any) and the relevant authorities.”¹⁰

⁹ See for example the Level 3 Certificate in Energy Process Operations:

<https://www.witt.ac.nz/study/engineering-energy-and-infrastructure/energy/certificate-in-energy-process-operations-level-3/>

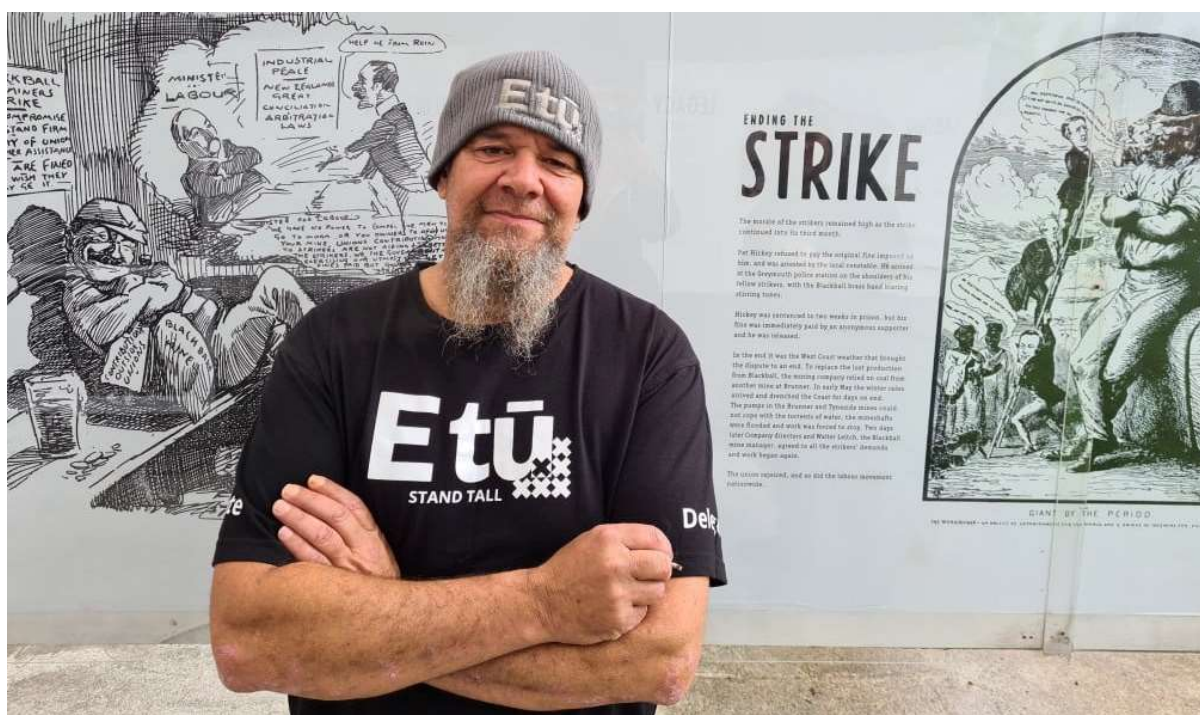
¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2017). *Back to Work: New Zealand, Improving the Re-employment Prospects of Displaced Workers*. Page 12. Available at https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/back-to-work-new-zealand_9789264264434-en#page1

Positive comment was made about programmes in Stratford High School (and no doubt others) which saw students in the final year of school go out on placement to local industries to get a feel for the work and whether it would be something that would interest them.

Finally, participants were asked about the question posed by the New Zealand Productivity Commission in its *Low-emissions economy: Final report* of the appropriate balance between regions and individuals in terms of targeted support. The Commission concluded that interventions that respond to the shock of the loss of a major employer in a region should focus on the labour market and skills needs of individual workers, rather than of the needs of regions.¹¹ Views were mixed, with a general sense that people's preference was absolutely to stay in Taranaki, but they recognised that if moving was the only way to secure economic certainty then this would be done.

"My belief is that all comes down to family – if you're settled here, you'd rather stay, if you're just starting out your career you might be easier to move."

"The region's got a strong hold on people, and you'll compensate for other factors to stay here. To buy a house in Auckland I'd have to take on another mortgage, and it's just not viable."



¹¹ New Zealand Productivity Commission. (2018). *Low Emissions Economy: Final Report*. Finding 10.7, Page 288. Available at <https://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/lowemissions/>

Views from employers

Introduction

This report primarily focuses on the expectations workers in Taranaki would have of a just transition locally. However we also wanted to hear from employers about the change they are seeing in their industries and on what arrangements they considered would be a reasonable expectation of themselves in terms of supporting workers in transition, and support they would expect from others.

We spoke with five employers in Taranaki, predominately from the oil and gas sector or its wider supply chain industries (4 of the 5 firms, with the 5th being in manufacturing but actively involved in local energy sector issues).

Summary of feedback

Change coming to your industry

Employers expressed a concern around oil and gas industry's future and uncertainty for global inward investment. Replacement industries may have 10 to 15 year lead in time before they create new opportunities for workers, especially given the need for supporting infrastructure and industry that would be required to help support the transition.

One firm said that a future industry that is progressive and aligns with good environmental practices is possible. It would require investors to be able to have confidence in the local Taranaki industry, and government policies, and that the workforce was ready to believe in their own futures with their company and invest their time and energy in this with firms.

Another firm expected minimal long-term change to their industry as their product was a part of the solution to moving to lower carbon energy use in New Zealand, and in terms of their business operations, they were already as mechanised as they likely could be, and staffing required for maintenance would not be done using robotics.

Feedback from another firm centred more on the challenges of maintaining advantage against low-cost competitors in countries whose labour costs were lower and regulatory environment more lax.

Thinking about change for your firm

One firm noted that with a fair playing field provided by good government policy and practices, then employment loss would not be significant, and they would instead concentrate on upskilling their workforce to keep relevance in their skills and add value to their roles and their employer.

No employment loss was reported at another firm (no employment increase was expected either however, as it was a small team).

Another firm was not expecting losses but support from government to ensure an even playing field with overseas low-cost competitors would likely enhance job prospects.

Automation

Most firms noted this has already impacted on the business, and what remained was safety critical and unlikely to drop further.

One firm saw automation such as high detection technology and data collation as enhancing the jobs of their employees and would see them experiencing more efficient and safer work and have higher skills. They were not of the view that it would replace people on the ground.

Another firm advised that any new automation would come at a huge cost and the need to feel comfortable in investing is currently not the case.

Their own role as employer in supporting worker transitions

One firm provided a view that they up-skill their labour force when it is client driven to remain essential to those clients.

One firm maintained that their strong preference was to avoid work around 'transitions' as it signalled to their employees that there wasn't a future in the firm. Rather, they are focused on modifying their business model including their energy inputs in order to stay at the cutting edge and maintain employment opportunities.

Another firm said they would focus on what is relevant for their business. Any support for worker transition measures would have to come at no cost for the business, as there was potentially a lot of investment for no value added to the business. Their goal is to maintain staff in their current roles and not have to transition out of their jobs.

Expectations of government in supporting worker transitions

Answers tended to focus on policy settings which affect the operating environment of the firms that were spoken to, rather than the role of government in worker transitions. This included consistency and longevity in policy and that certainty is needed around giving businesses time and opportunity to prepare for change.

One firm said that if the ask is to allow for time off work to train, then government funding was needed to allow that to happen.

Another said that government would need to create the framework for worker transitions. If there was a standard that employers could follow, then they could look at it locally.

Existing training within the firm

At the employers we spoke to, existing training was mostly based on refresher training and up-skilling and technical qualifications.

One firm estimated that training was currently split 50/50 with internal plant qualifications and external training providers for unit standards in qualifications such as confined spaces, working at heights.



Employers spoke about involvement in the Energy Skills Aotearoa programme, where employers sponsor participation in the WITT course and provide placements for students in industry. It was reported that this worked well, and employers were pleased to be able to help increase and maintain the skill set in the Taranaki region.

Another firm said that along with depot specific training, they also trained on wellbeing and stress awareness which are things they valued.

Workers retraining for new roles while still with their current employer

This was seen as problematic as it needed to not impact on current work cycles. One firm noted that could see some benefit in it but would have to be determined on a case-by-case basis. The firm's current structure of roster allows for workers to have the opportunities to train during their time-off and it would be reasonable for government to provide funding for this as it was their impact on the workforce that is requiring additional skill sets.

Another said they had a small team, and this was not a big issue, as all workers had already been offered training in Front Line Management and allowed to do this in working hours.

A question was posed that it would be hard for the government to be fair across all industries, would a scheme like this be for specific industries, and how would they be chosen?

In general, firms spoken to noted that there would need to be a benefit for their firm to participate.

Pooling

In other sectors one employer was aware of where a scheme of this nature occurred, employers were then pressured to take on people that they did not actually want. Or workers cycling between the firms and not committing. It was expressed that a pooling approach could have potential, but they wouldn't support it unqualified, it would require funding to bridge the gaps, and would need to be run by a third party for companies to trust. More information was needed around how it would be funded, facilities required, how it would be structured, and research into how companies operate, roster patterns and remuneration.

Another firm expressed a concern that they spend a huge amount of time and investment in company culture and would be unsure how bringing someone in who may be experienced in panel operation, but not invested in their workplace culture, would work out. Progression of internal employees was also noted as important.

Note – in the above discussions, the use of the word pooling was unhelpful, as redeployment was more what the intent of a scheme would be. We used redeployment thereafter.

Special focus: panel operators

E tū conducted an additional project which extended on the above research by exploring the value of a multi-employer redeployment scheme as part of a just transition response, with a particular focus on panel operators as an occupational group. Multi-employer redeployment schemes have been a feature of overseas just transition processes, including in Germany, Canada and most recently Victoria in Australia, which designed them for the phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation. Essentially, redeployment schemes involve participating firms working together to coordinate labour demand and manage workers' transition between firms. Below we set out some international examples of the schemes, followed by analysis of the views of workers and employers on the matter.

Multi-employer redeployment schemes in action overseas

In Australia in 2017, the Victorian state government sought to minimise the impact of the closure of the Hazelwood power station and mine on workers and communities by developing and funding, with unions, the Latrobe Valley Worker Transfer Scheme¹² – a multi-employer pooling and redeployment programme. Participating employers at other coal fired electricity plants nearby commit to giving staff the opportunity to retire or resign by offering them a voluntary early retirement payment – and vacancies are thus created for the retrenched Hazelwood workers. This was run in accordance with the employers' existing recruitment and selection procedures. The Victorian Government entered into separate Partnership Agreements with each of the participating employers and the Latrobe Valley Unions.

Earlier, the German government implemented a programme for transition out of coal mining over several decades, as the number of jobs in the industry dropped from 130,300 in 1990 to 12,100 in 2014. In 2007 the federal government reached an agreement with two state governments, a large mining firm (RAG) and the Mining, Chemical and Energy Industrial Union to discontinue subsidies and find 'socially acceptable means' of ending the mining of coal in Germany by 2018. From the beginning, unions,



employers and government cooperatively planned the transition. Preference was given to displaced workers when it came to new employment opportunities in remaining mines. Training was provided to workers so that they could find good jobs in other industries. Some opted for early retirement, supported with transition payments available for up to five years. There were financial security measures through redundancy protection, wage safeguards and so on, but an expectation of flexibility: a worker whose job ceases to exist may have to take up another one in another part of the country, either in the coal industry or at a

¹² Premier Daniel Andrews, 'Worker Transfer Scheme to Keep Skilled Jobs in the Valley', Press release, Victoria State Government, Australia, 1 March 2017, <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/worker-transfer-scheme-to-keep-skilled-jobs-in-the-valley>.

subsidiary company of their employer. The union negotiated some limits on the number of times workers can be moved between different and often geographically distant plants.¹³

There are other examples of pooling labour demand risk, such as 'labour demand calendars', as attempted by agricultural employers in the Narrabri district of northwest New South Wales, turning seasonally based fragments of jobs into, potentially, a year-round offering of employment for local workers¹⁴, or equally work done by New Zealand industry to take a group approach to apprenticeships, such as those by ETCO¹⁵ (master electricians) and ATNZ¹⁶ (formerly Competenz ITO).

Employer focus groups – summary of discussion

Two focus group discussions were held with Taranaki employers in May and June 2021. 5 employers that E tū has a relationship with were selected for these (some similar to the earlier research project, some differed, but like the above representatives, most were either directly involved in energy sector or were in related or wider infrastructure sectors). A summary of general comments is below, followed by reactions to the idea of a multi-employer redeployment scheme in Taranaki.

Workforce that may benefit from this

Participants at the meetings reflected on the potential of this discussion for other parts of the workforce outside panel operators, noting that panel operators are a small number, but wider support services staff are greater (eg piping, chemists, engineers were raised). Many other infrastructure sectors are in demand across such as civil engineering, planning, control system engineers, maintenance, instrumentation and electrical (I&E) equipment technicians. A comment was made that I&E technicians may present good potential for a multi-employer pooled approach given how critical they are.

Sectors

It was noted that some sectors (such as gas) will be in (eventual) decline whereas there are others (infrastructure, new energy such as hydrogen) that will experience growth. A comment was made that new energy development such as hydrogen has technology being developed which is inherently automated and so the challenge is that this sector isn't likely to be the replacement industry for a significant volume of workers.

It was identified that it would be useful to discuss the extent to which there is already some workforce supplied by contractors on a temporary basis, to deal with demand fluctuations, and assess how well this works for people, as it was felt it does have some merit.

Existing coordination

There was discussion on how coordination between employers could take place – where it had been attempted in coordinating maintenance shutdowns/turnarounds in the past, to

¹³ Béla Galgóczi, 'The long and winding road from black to green: Decades of structural change in the Ruhr region', *International Journal of Labour Research*, 6, 2 (2014), p.221, https://www.ilo.org/actrav/international-journal-labour-research/WCMS_375223/lang--en/index.htm

¹⁴ John Buchanan, John, Anderson, Pauline and Power, Gail, *Skill Ecosystems*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Skills and Training* Edited by John Buchanan, David Finegold, Ken Mayhew, and Chris Warhurst. 2017, Oxford University Press. Page 449.

¹⁵ See <https://www.etc.co.nz/about>

¹⁶ See <https://www.atnz.org.nz/about-atnz/>

enable shared use of external contractors, participants were aware that anti-competition/collusion barriers had been raised.

Training

Employers praised the WITT course as being excellent and had similar comments to the workers interviewed that it provided a good base, and then site-specific skills were learned on job. Micro credentials were discussed also. Employers wanted the fundamental courses to stay as the base but add on to these. It was discussed that there are financial disincentives for training providers in rolling out micro credentials, so this needed to be raised as an important point from this discussion, that funding barriers need to be overcome for providers to allow this support to industry.

Initial views on a multi-employer redeployment scheme

There were mixed views initially among the group. Some commented that they would see a redeployment pool as an entry point but would still want to run their own recruitment. There were views expressed that if there are declining workforces across some employers then they'd be keen to be part of discussions about how they can look at a model like this, and that they appreciated a way of working together to tackling workforce issues. Another comment was that they liked the approach of using a scheme to manage attrition.

It was commented that a structured approach would be required – a practical and easy to administer scheme, as if it was too onerous then we would struggle to get firms to actively participate. A further comment was made that the pooling examples from overseas are about when you are at the cliff, we need to get ahead of it so were not at the cliff.

The point was made a few times by employers that this approach assumed there would be retrenching firms, whereas the opportunity to support firms to modify their business models and energy inputs and stay competitive and in business should not be overlooked.

“There seems to be an equating that old industries are high emissions and need closing, where that's not the only possibility. The first thing we should look at is how to decarbonise these industries first. The Ballance Agri Nutrients example¹⁷ is the classic example – it's not just sailing off into the sunset, we change. So ideally then it's same firm, same workforce, but slightly different skills, and micro credentials will be key.”

Potential benefits of a scheme

One employer commented that a useful role for a scheme like this would be instead of just defaulting to the advert on seek.co.nz, a firm would talk to others first and have a discussion around likely skills demand that they were in the market for, and have a more active process around recruiting talent from among employers.

“The sweet spot is for us as a firm who is likely to be a net recipient of staff, being able to go to other firms in a shared process and outline how we are upsizing and our anticipated growth, note other firms likely downsizing, and identify who among your staff

¹⁷ This was a reference to the partnership between Ballance Agri-nutrients and Hiringa Energy for wind generated electricity at Ballance's Kapuni site, that will be used for green hydrogen to replace imported diesel for heavy transport and for use at the Ballance plant. See <https://www.greenhydrogennz.com/> for details on this partnership.

we can pick up. In some cases we (recipient employer) might need them to do a two year qualification to work in our sector, so let's get them sorted now to plan it out."

It was also commented that often there was a fear of people leaving if they have a key piece of information, but it can lead to underemployment (i.e. their specific skill in a certain area is needed, but it may not be needed full time) and was there a way to cross pollinate?

"The other benefit is if we have high potential candidates there is possibly an opportunity for us to start their studies to update their skills for our sector, while they are still in their existing role. It's about a two-year learning curve, so anything we can do to shorten that process is going to be high value to us."

Barriers

Barriers discussed included:

- Intellectual property if workers were coming and going as part of a pooled approach
- Different processes, the panel operators had some common skills but several site-specific requirements
- It doesn't make sense to rotate staff for short assignments, but more a swap/redeployment.
- A possible barrier in a firm's recruitment policies (i.e. the need to go to open market). But if they were part of a mandated formal process, that might help alleviate this issue
- Still a need to close off a worker's employment at their departure firm and the tasks needed to be finished up. If some sort of process like this was established – that will presumably give the worker some sense of security of employment, firms would want to ensure they'd be engaged in the existing employer while this is happening to continue the work.
- Wage differential across those present was significant, and if common wage levels was a pre-condition this would be a barrier to participation.

"Wages are a problem. Are there ways of providing for a soft landing that allows us to commit to workers with our salary structure, but it's a bridging scheme that helps smooth that process out? Worth starting to start conversation on."

Worker survey

Survey group

45 workers in the Taranaki region were surveyed as part of this second research project. They were members of E tū who were employed at worksites such as Balance, Contact, New Plymouth District Council, South Taranaki District Council, New Zealand Energy Corp, Tegal and Todd Energy. In their current roles, 42% had been employed for less than 5 years, and 56% for 5 or more years, with several having served for 15 to 20 years or more. Over half were 45 years or older, all but one was male, and the most common weekly hours worked were 40, 42 and 48.

Summary

When asked what barriers they perceived to their employer participating in a redeployment scheme, the most common responses related to firm specific requirements for control room

panel operators, with issues such as knowledge of different plants and processes and site competency requirements featuring strongly, and others such as the refresher training costs to companies in order to keep people certified, management culture, and the ability to be able to select the right person for the job, also featuring. When asked who should pay for workers' retraining while in the current role but anticipating a move to another, given the options of themselves, their current employer, their future industry/employer, Government or a combination of these: the majority chose a combination, followed by their future industry/employer. More detail is set out below.

Career pathway

Surveyed workers came into their roles through a variety of sources. A majority said there was a vacancy they applied for, followed by those that identified they had a background in a related trade, followed by recommended or word of mouth. Some also highlighted the WITT course. When asked how hard it was to get in to their industry, the majority said it was somewhat hard or very hard.

In terms of their external qualifications, the most common one was the Energy and Chemical Operations (Enchem) quals, followed by water treatment related quals (there was a significant number of NPDC staff surveyed). In terms of internal training or competencies, many mentioned plant specific knowledge that could only realistically be attained on-job.

We asked what their approach would be if they needed to find new work, and gave several possible options (such as look for vacancies within my trade, within a similar role/industry, enrol in training courses, early retirement, move to different region to find similar role, stay in region and move to different industry/role). Most however ticked multiple of these so we weren't able to ascertain any reliable data on this, other than there was stronger support among those surveyed for remaining in Taranaki, in that stay in region and move to different industry/role was much more frequently selected than move to different region to find similar role.

Remuneration

When asked whether they expected their experience to be recognised in terms of pay and benefits in some way were to move to another industry or employer with a similar role, a strong majority understandably strongly or somewhat agreed. However, there was also a level of tolerance for being started on a lower rate at a new job, provided there was an ability to then move up through pay scales, but there was a more mixed response to the question of whether they would consider benefits such as extra leave entitlements as acceptable instead if a new employer couldn't match their pay.

Barriers to participation in multi-employer redeployment initiatives

Respondents were asked what barriers they perceived to their employer participating in a redeployment scheme. The most common responses related to the firm specific requirements for control room panel operators, with options (from a pre-set selection) such as knowledge of different plants and processes and site competency requirements featuring strongly, with others such as the refresher training costs to companies in order to keep people certified, management culture, and the ability to be able to select the right person for the job, also featuring.

When asked who should pay for workers' retraining while they are still in the current role but anticipating a move to another, given the options of themselves, their current employer, their

future industry/employer, Government or a combination of these: the majority chose a combination, followed by their future industry/employer.

Vacancies and staff planning

We asked a series of questions around how vacancies are managed and related issues. For the questions 'my employer communicates with us when an operator is planning to retire/resign', 'my employer values internal progression when succession planning', 'my employer engages with staff when internal vacancies become available' and 'I am given opportunities to advance and train on the job' there was general agreement on this: around half of respondents either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed, with less than a quarter somewhat or strongly disagreeing (the balance neither agree nor disagree). There was less support though for the statements 'current staffing levels meet the needs of me and my colleagues' (responses evenly spread across the five agree/disagree response levels given) and 'opportunities for flexible working hours and job sharing are available for workers who have indicated retirement in the near future' (around 60% either somewhat or strongly disagreeing).

Conclusions and recommendations

Just transition is still a relatively new concept in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a result, it is early enough for social partners to shape the design of it and make sure it will deliver for workers experiencing change, and in doing so rectify some of the shortcomings that have been identified, such as those in the OECD report, in our support for displaced workers.

Based on the views presented during this research, the following recommendations are made for future work on just transitions in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1. **Workers need time to be part of transitions planning.** There is little structural support for workers to be part of transition planning. In Taranaki, workers who wanted to be part of the community wide Taranaki 2050 Roadmap process needed to take annual leave or negotiate one-off time off with their employers to participate. A transition cannot be a just one unless workers can be at the driving seat of designing it, and consideration needs to be made to structured mechanisms to support workers to be part of this. The former Employment Relations Education Contestable Fund, a fund set up during the Helen Clark government of the 2000s and available to both employers and unions, may provide some model to work from.¹⁸
2. **Frank and open discussion is needed between workers and unions and employers on change coming to industry.** Most workers interviewed for this research did not rate highly the level of preparedness for change at their worksite, including their engagement with their employer over this. Appendix 2 of this report contains some discussions starters to assist improving this. The OECD *Back to Work* report discussed earlier also addresses this; among its recommendations were the strengthening of employer requirements around longer notice of redundancies.
3. **Workers retraining while still on the tools.** Workers interviewed for this research supported the ability to retrain for future roles while they were still employed in their current role. It is acknowledged this is easier said than done, and we take on board feedback from employers that where there isn't immediate benefit for their firm, it is hard for them to see how they would support this. Nevertheless, a smooth transition would ideally involve removing any gaps in employment that workers face, and we recommend options for retraining before workers need to leave their current job are investigated.
4. **Redeployment schemes.** When the German and Australian redeployment schemes were discussed with workers, there was considerable interest in them. As the special focus on panel operators showed also, there was some support from employers and even where support was more muted there was regardless some very constructive advice on design features and barriers that would need to be overcome if a scheme were set up. The proposed New Zealand Income Insurance Scheme when implemented will address the replacement income side of the equation for workers, but if this were able to be coupled with a structured approach to redeployment, this could benefit both workers themselves, and firms and regions in respect of retaining skilled workers.

¹⁸ See detail about the fund in the background note for media section of this media release <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/employment-relations-education-contestable-fund-allocations-20032004>

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Appendices

Base requirements for regional transitions – E tū views

This below guide was developed by E tū in 2020 to create a base of key expectations the union would have of any regional/place-based just transition process. E tū has well established policy²⁰ on just transition and the union also draws on policy and publications from the NZCTU²¹ and the ITUC's Just Transition Centre²². This overview was seeking to extend beyond policy into practical requirements of a just transition for workers.

E tū uses this as a base document, and then modifies suggestions the union brings to the table based on the differing features of any transition the union involved in, including factors such as whether there was a hard deadline (e.g. a plant closure) or a more gradual reduction in activity in a certain economic sector, the state of existing community planning processes underway, the union's level of capacity to be involved and whether other unions would instead be in a lead role based on relevant membership, and so on.

It is noted that the guide below is primarily aimed at regional/place-based transitions, such as when a regional area is moving away from an industry group (e.g. oil and gas in Taranaki), or a key employer (e.g. NZAS at Tiwai Point near Invercargill). There are other significant areas of just transition that this guide doesn't specifically cover, but are priorities that the union works on elsewhere. This includes for example ensuring an overt gender lens is brought to the work on just transition and that the focus is not only on the (male dominated) roles in heavy industries, but rather 'rebuild better' principles are applied to ensure good jobs in all the sectors that will remain in a region, for example social infrastructure such as care work. Likewise, E tū has views on how to ensure that the country and economy wide changes required as the country decarbonises do not penalise poor people, and the union is contributing its views and expertise to the distributional impacts assessment work government is carrying out as a requirement of section 57G (3) of the *Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019*.

¹⁹ <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/employment-and-skills/nz-industrial-relations-foundation/>

²⁰ See <https://etu.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/E-t%C5%AB-Just-Transition-policy.pdf>, and our overall just transition page at <https://www.etu.nz/JustTransition/>

²¹ See <https://www.union.org.nz/just-transition/>

²² See <https://www.ituc-csi.org/just-transition-centre>

Just transition components:	Key requirements	Local role	National role
Economic diversification	-Rigorous economic analysis about potential and comparative advantage for new/emerging industries -Direct investment in new and cluster industries from government -Labour intensive local infrastructure including social infrastructure. -Procurement that preferences good replacement jobs, not just any job, including commitments around a living wage, health and safety, union access and/or a collective agreement and other labour standards -Support for community economic development	-Regions have a role in determining local strengths and economic potential and forming coherent views on where investment (both private sector, Crown), best applied. -Māori economic activity supported including with any assistance required from Crown	-Government as both funder/investor in new industries and infrastructure, and in providing assistance with detailed economic planning, esp. in relation to comparative advantage and economic complexity modelling -Tripartite industry planning through Industry Transformation Plans
Social dialogue and planning	-In Aotearoa, tripartism is insufficient to ensure all voices are at the table. Mana whenua as Tiriti partner must play central role in transition planning, working with other social partners of government, unions and employers. This can also be broadened to others such as civil society, local government and education (see for example Taranaki's <i>Nga Kaiwhakaterere o Taranaki 7 pou</i>) -Funded support for workers themselves to help design the transition including through education programmes and governance. This can start at the workplace, using the ITUC's CEPOW framework²³	-Inclusive Local level social dialogue and planning processes -RSLGs: local labour market planning -Transition plans with wide focus, i.e. not just directly affected workers at a plant closure, but wider cluster/ support and service industries. -Employers encouraged to allow paid release time for workers to engage.	-Crown recognising mana whenua as Tiriti partners and giving effect to Te Tiriti in its investment, regulation and planning decisions -National level social dialogue, such as Future of Work Tripartite Forum -Government resourcing for social partners as required
Social protection	-Pension top ups/adjustment allowance as bridge to retirement -Employer fund for income support -Support for collective agreements to manage the transition process; access for unions to affected workers -Social insurance -Brokering other supports such as mortgage/rent relief	-At a local level, local firms should commit to a social protection fund to assist workers to make the transition into new jobs or in some instances early retirement	-Social insurance scheme in design²⁴, for 2024 implementation earliest, but this could be piloted in a region. -Implementation of WEAG recommendations -A national fund for just transitions to support engagement and to support workers wanting to retrain/redeploy
Supporting workers in transition	-Job placement and careers advisory services -Relocation assistance -Recognition of prior learning (RPL) services -Comprehensive training package, co-funded by employers and government, including access and paid time off for workers to retrain, short term placements in new jobs ahead of retrenchment. -Pooling of risk – group schemes such as multi-employer redeployment schemes, group apprentice schemes -Closure notification requirements of firms -Support for union delegates/ reps to manage process for members	-Local firms participating in group schemes -Employer commitment to preference new hires from any formal schemes, as a conditionality of any support from government -Social and community welfare support services -Active involvement from key education providers and agencies locally such as Te Pūkenga, Ministry of Education	-A suite of government assistance through active labour market policies -Regulatory changes as necessary such as incentives to participate in group schemes, requirements for early closure notifications -Funding for transition services and funding for key local actors (such as unions, NGOs) to support workforce

²³ Climate and Employment Proof Our Work – see <https://www.ituc-csi.org/cepow>

²⁴ Some discussion in papers here <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/employment-and-skills/future-of-work-tripartite-forum/>

Structured employer employee negotiation guide – some resources

In order to assist employers and workers to manage transitions, provided below are three resources that are an initial offering to get this started. The first is an excerpt from material used during the Taranaki 2050 consultation processes in February to May 2019, leading up to the Taranaki Just Transition Summit in May.²⁵ The second is some material modified by the Council of Trade Unions based on the International Trade Union Confederation's Climate Proof Our Work document.²⁶ Finally, a model clause for use in collective agreements is provided, developed by E tū based on an international example.

Resource 1 – values and visioning discussion

Values

- What do you love about Taranaki? What's most important to you and your life here?
- What values or value system do you and your family hold dear?
- Describe what your neighbourhood/community would look like if everyone had the same values/values system? Would it look any different? Do you know?

Vision/future

What does Taranaki look like in 2050 if we all committed to and invested in those values now?

- How is Taranaki different?
- What industry/technology has emerged?
- How many hours does someone need to work to have the lifestyle balance we all enjoy?
 - How do we make work worthwhile? What changes?
 - Eg, If tech replaces human work hours, then does income need to reduce? Why or why not?
- How do people in our community connect?
- What does our environment look and feel like?
 - What's changed?
 - How do we connect with our environment?
 - How do we interact with our environment?

Resource 2 – template agenda for employer-worker discussion on climate and just transition

1. How do we think [insert here] (e.g., low emissions, climate change, net zero, another pandemic, automation, tech) will affect this workplace?
2. What activity at this workplace generates emissions? What generates waste?
3. Do we measure the emissions and/or waste generated by this workplace?
4. What can we do to reduce any of those emissions and waste?
 - a. What targets should we set?
 - b. How will these targets help us reach net-zero greenhouse emissions by 2050 and 50% reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2030 - in line with global agreements?

²⁵ <https://www.taranaki.co.nz/vision-and-strategy/taranaki-2050-and-tapuae-roa/taranaki-2050/>

²⁶ <https://www.ituc-csi.org/cpow-campaign-en>

5. What impact will any reduction have on how this workplace operates?
 - a. Who might that have a negative impact on at work? How can we mitigate that?
 - b. Who might benefit and how can we amplify that?
6. What next steps do we need to take?
 - a. Who else in this workplace needs to be involved?
 - b. What specific actions can we start now?
 - c. When will we meet again to see how we are going?
7. Next steps/action points/future meetings

Resource 3 – sample collective agreement clause²⁷

Commitment to Long Term Success of [insert here] Industry In [Region NZ; date]

The Parties recognize the importance of a long-term successful [insert here] Industry in [Region] and in particular within the communities and facilities which [Employer/Company] operates.

To this end the Company is prepared to work jointly with E tū to secure the following:

- Work jointly with E tū, its officers, delegates and member leaders and contacts, to seek funding for the advancement of the above stated purposes including alternate fuels etc., otherwise referred to as “Green Initiatives”, from Local and State Govt/Ministries and their agencies etc.
- Work jointly with E tū, its officers, delegates and member leaders and contacts, to acquire a [Product] supply that gives a long term viable supply of [Product] at a fair market price.
- Work jointly with E tū, its officers, delegates and member leaders and contacts, Local and State Govt/Ministries and their agencies etc., to acquire funding and/or investment opportunities for a wider range of higher valued products and possible finished product opportunities.
- Work jointly with E tū, its officers, delegates and member leaders and contacts, Local and State Govt/Ministries and their agencies etc., to develop a [insert here] Industry training initiative for new employees, [Occupation] (eg, Operators), Trades and other positions requiring certification. This may require working closely with other heavy industry employers across [Region].
- Work jointly with E tū, its officers, delegates and member leaders and contacts, Local and State Govt/Ministries and their agencies etc., to develop a programme to ensure that no E tū member who wants to remain employed is left behind, including retraining & redeployment options within the company’s business or external with other companies.

A review of the status of these ventures and initiatives will be conducted on a quarterly basis at the [Forum], any value achieved will be applied to the ongoing operation of the NZ operations.

²⁷ Modelled on a similar Canadian clause, at https://kipdf.com/labour-agreement_5ac5b02a1723dd67d2cf95b6.html