



Joint Statement by Australian Workers Union and Australian Aluminium Council

Australia's aluminium supply chain has never been more essential

The Australian Aluminium Council and Australian Workers Union is concerned that any narrowing of the essential worker definition that impacted on the aluminium industry's complex supply chain, as part of shutdown measures, risks the permanent closure of alumina refineries and aluminium smelters across the country and in turn thousands of jobs.

The integrated aluminium industry is a unique and essential industry in Australia. It relies not only on bauxite mines, alumina refineries and aluminium smelters but also on contractors for crucial supplies and services. Our sites rely on these small to medium sized businesses, who supply specialist skills, products and services for the continued safe operation of our facilities.

The temporary closure in any part of this supply chain could result in chemical instability in alumina refineries or the freezing of an aluminium smelter, risking permanent closure of these operations. The industry, if turned off, cannot simply be turned back on. The destruction of capital and jobs would be devastating for Australia's regional economy and communities.

Aluminium smelters also played a critical role in the stability of the electricity grid, at periods of both high and low electricity demand. This is crucial in the stable ongoing operation of the electricity market and helps minimise the risk of blackouts at this time of crisis. Aluminium smelters are working closely with AEMO (Australian Energy Market Operator) to ensure this continuity of supply.

As representatives of the Australian aluminium industry, we are urging state and federal governments to maintain a broad definition of essential workers in manufacturing during the COVID 19 crisis, echoing the Prime Minister's sentiment that every Australian employed in this economy is an essential worker.

The Australian aluminium industry directly employs around 14,500 people nationally and provides incomes to a further 40,000 families in regional Australia. Most of these employees and contractors are locally based, living near regional operations around Australia.

Health and safety are always the number one priority of both employers and unions, and it has never been more important than in these unprecedented times. Extensive additional health and measures are in place across the operations. For operational staff, the size of operations and shift patterns naturally limit physical interactions. Our sites already use protective equipment such as respirators, gloves and face protection, in their day to day work. All sites have introduced additional measures to increase physical distancing, split shifts and maintain high hygiene standards, to mitigate the risk of COVID 19 infections to employees. Additionally, support staff have been working at home, or in rotating teams, since the first signs of this crisis emerged.

Our industry employs dedicated health professionals, interpreting the latest Government guidelines to keep all workers and communities safe. The latest information and practices are also shared with suppliers and contractors, to ensure the whole supply chain remained safe and healthy.

The Aluminium Council and the Australian Workers' Union call on State and Federal Governments to do everything in their collective power to keep Australians safe today while maintaining the essential aluminium industry, which will be critical in keeping our country prosperous today and rebuilding it in the future. Put simply, the aluminium industry must be exempt from any shutdown measures.



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