

Tuesday, 26 November 2024

Unions welcome plans to protect workers from AI misuse

The ACTU welcomes today's report by the Senate Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence with its strong emphasis on proposals to protect workers' rights amid the widespread adoption of AI systems and other new technologies.

The report recommends using the Occupational Health and Safety framework of tripartism to bring more oversight to the introduction of AI.

It also recommends placing a positive duty on employers to identify and mitigate the risks of AI and establishes consultation rights for workers so the risks of new AI systems can be better managed.

Australian Unions also welcome recommendations to protect creative workers against the theft of their work, ensure greater transparency on the use of creative works in AI systems, and undertake consultation to ensure fair remuneration for creative workers.

The recommendation for an over-arching AI Act will be vital in ensuring a coordinated approach is taken across government so the impacts of AI systems being introduced around the country are fully considered.

The Committee's report has recognised the potential benefits of AI for workers. But it has also highlighted the unfortunate reality, that these systems are already being used to undermine working peoples' rights and conditions, through automated decision making, intrusive surveillance, and the haphazard adoption of new technology.

The Committee has concluded that the use of AI systems that impact the rights of people at work is high-risk and working peoples' fundamental rights must be protected.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus:

"Workers should be at the centre of AI adoption at work and today's Senate Inquiry report has confirmed that.

"Workers are often enthusiastic about the potential benefits of AI but are rightly wary of the major risks of AI being misused to undermine wages, conditions and to sack workers in cynical cost-cutting exercises.

"So far, large multinational companies and the biggest businesses have been making the major decisions around AI and too often workers have been denied a voice.

"The Senate Inquiry has recognised that commonsense protections need to be introduced or strengthened to ensure that working people's basic rights are preserved, including the right to meaningful consultation.

"Unions support the Committee's proposal to extend the existing and well-respected OH&S framework to the introduction of AI systems to ensure employers are aware of their responsibility to identify and mitigate the potential risks of these AI tools."

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Media contact: Luisa Saccotelli (0400) 149 901