

## **Costs of death, injuries immeasurable**

April 28 is International Workers' Memorial Day, a day marked annually across the globe, to remember those workers who have become ill, injured or died because of work. Every year, we wish we didn't have to mark the fact that too many workers don't return home at the end of their day.

Safety at work is in the public spotlight right now. The media have to report on workplace deaths too often. Most recently, the death of Christopher Cassaniti, an 18-year-old apprentice who was killed when scaffolding collapsed at his Sydney worksite, broke all our hearts. His was the fifth death on an Australian construction site this year.

Parliamentary inquiries have dealt with important safety issues over the last year with Senate inquiries investigating industrial deaths and the mental health of first responders.

Australia's model work health and safety laws were also independently reviewed by Marie Boland over the last year for the first time since their implementation in 2011. The review report made 34 recommendations. They should all be implemented.

Safety is in the spotlight now because too many Australians still die or are injured at work. In 2018, preliminary data shows there were 157 Australian workers killed at work. To March 21 this year, 30 Australian workers have already died because of their job.

The statistics for Tasmania are not good either. Twenty-two people have died in work-related incidents over the past three years. And there have been 8958 serious injuries in Tasmanian workplaces over the same period. The human cost of these deaths and injuries is immeasurable. These numbers are shocking. In the union movement, we fight for safety because we believe all deaths are preventable and one death is too many. It is why we are campaigning to change the rules around workplace safety.

A multi-faceted approach to legislative change, workplace culture, penalties and policy is needed to make real progress when it comes to reducing death, disease and illness in our workplaces.

We need strong laws, enforced by bold safety regulators who are both culturally and financially resourced to take on the bosses that don't keep their workers safe. We need employers to champion a safety culture that discourages cutting corners to save a buck. We need strong penalties when workplace laws are bent or breached.

Workers must be facilitated to seek the support and assistance of their union in investigating and resolving safety disputes at work. And we need industrial manslaughter laws now. The trade union movement have long advocated for industrial manslaughter as we continue to battle employers who put profit before safety. We need to deter employers from shirking safety and to hold negligent bosses to account. We're calling for action now and we're pleased to see support for industrial manslaughter laws coming from other sources too.

In 2018, the Senate Education and Employment References Committee inquired into the prevention, investigation and prosecution of industrial deaths in Australia. After a thorough examination of the systems and frameworks surrounding workplace deaths, and after hearing hours of harrowing testimony from devastated families, the committee recommended that Safe Work Australia work with all levels of government to introduce a nationally consistent industrial manslaughter offence into our WHS laws using the Queensland jurisdiction as a start point.

Other jurisdictions already have industrial manslaughter laws. They were first introduced in the ACT in 2003, in Queensland in 2017 and the recently re-elected Andrews Government in Victoria have announced they will make industrial manslaughter law too. Federal Labor supported industrial manslaughter at their December National Conference. The independent review into our model WHS laws by Marie Boland was handed down in February this year. It also recommended a specific offence of causing the death of a worker or other person through negligent act or omission be created. Where then is the Morrison Government on the issue of worker's deaths? They stand opposed to industrial manslaughter laws and do everything in their power to make it hard for workers to access their union to help make their workplace safer. They set up the Australian Building and Construction Commission who has not prosecuted one, single employer for a workplace death. But they have questioned workers about union stickers on hard hats. The ABCC is the Morrison Government's response and it's not good enough. Not nearly. Workers die because, at some point, a decision was made that safety wasn't important enough. Somewhere along the line, safety wasn't the top priority and a worker paid with their life.

Unions will always put worker's safety first. On International Workers Memorial Day, we say 'mourn for the dead, and fight for the living'. We honour the memory of those who are no longer with us. We hold services to support families and let them know that the union movement hasn't forgotten their loss. We recommit to making workplace safety a priority, every day. Every year, we gather at the Workers' Memorial Park, Elizabeth Gardens at Invermay, to hold a memorial service. Tomorrow, we will be there at 10am. We hope you will join us.

Jessica Munday is Unions Tasmania secretary.