

Fafo Seminar

Challenges and opportunities for a green and just  
transition in Norway

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## Driving Just Transition in an Australian coal region

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## What might a successful just transition look like? The Collie case, Australia

***“Just transition to me is Collie’s existence” (Mining & Energy union leader)***

1. Building a **process** with participation and good governance – dialogue, accountability, industry policy.
2. Delivering **outcomes** – orderly closures, new job opportunities, the survival of communities.

*We say that this (unusual) case, the town of Collie in the State of Western Australia, has been successful on the first measure and on some parts of the second.*



# Why study Collie?

- ❑ The most advanced transition program in Australia, phasing out all three coal-fired power stations and both the coalmines that supply them.
- ❑ This is happening in a State that is the site of the country's gas and iron ore export industries.



## Collie today – keeping the town alive, post-transition

### ➤ Population:

- ❑ 9,000
- ❑ Older, less educated than the rest of the State
- ❑ Power workers among the better paid: *delivering quality jobs is a core transition issue.*

### ➤ Main Occupations/Industries:

- ❑ Technicians and Trades Workers: 23.1 (State average 15.3)
- ❑ Machinery Operators and Drivers: 16.4 (State average 7.7)
- ❑ Mining and power generation are the biggest employers: 1,000 employees; 500 contractors.

## The making of the place – and transition

### The making of Collie:

- Mines and power stations were unionised; a ‘union town’.
- A vital energy site: because Collie has provided electricity for Perth, the main population centre.
- Distinct politics: the town has consistently supported the Australian Labor Party.

### Transition in this place:

- Potential for much more than mere ‘consultation’ ... but delivering jobs in *and beyond* renewable energy remains complex.
- There was the possibility that unions and workers might drive transition ... but that required some ‘hard conversations’.

## The Collie Just Transition Plan

### ➤ The Labor government's *Collie Just Transition Plan*:

- ❑ In the Department of Premier and Cabinet – *highest* level of government.
- ❑ One power station has already closed; last scheduled for 2029. A long but agreed *timeframe is important*.
- ❑ Just Transition Working Group, 2018 (and ongoing) – meets monthly *in* Collie.
- ❑ Government *funding* for economic diversification, skills, training.
- ❑ Individual *plans* for affected workers.

## Who is driving just transition in Collie?

- The *State government* has effectively taken over one coalmine.
- *Local government* closely involved.
- *Firms*: Mining firms less engaged than the power companies; small businesses are supportive.
- *Unions* have been active in practice as well as in policy-making – ensured that contractors as well as direct employees come under the Plan.



## A central question in our research: Can unions drive transition?

- First, union leaders and members must *want* change; they must support transition.
- Transition is “about self-determination ... versus global market decisions” (Metal Workers’ Union, campaign leader).
- Unions can do all this in Collie because of the history, the continuing high levels of unionisation, and the local and State politics:

“Keeping Collie red [that is, pro-Labor], and the union movement was central to that ... Collie had a long history connected to the union movement [and] tied to the Labor Party” (Director, State Workforce Planning, WA Government).

## Conclusion

Transition, labour, state, employers – some limits to change:

- *Organised labour* has shaped the town and transition – but it cannot deliver change by itself.
- *Firms' commitment and capacities* shape change – but they vary.
- Therefore, *state intervention* needed – but must be more than facilitating private investment.

So, labour, state, employers all shape transition – but so does the *relationship between them*: critics worry about *lack of coordination* among employers and between employers and state.

Are there lessons from this case?

- We must be cautious – the unusual combination of factors in Collie tells us how difficult *just* transition can be in general.