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

Bradon Ellem, University of Sydney Business School
Caleb Goods, University of Western Australia Business School

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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)

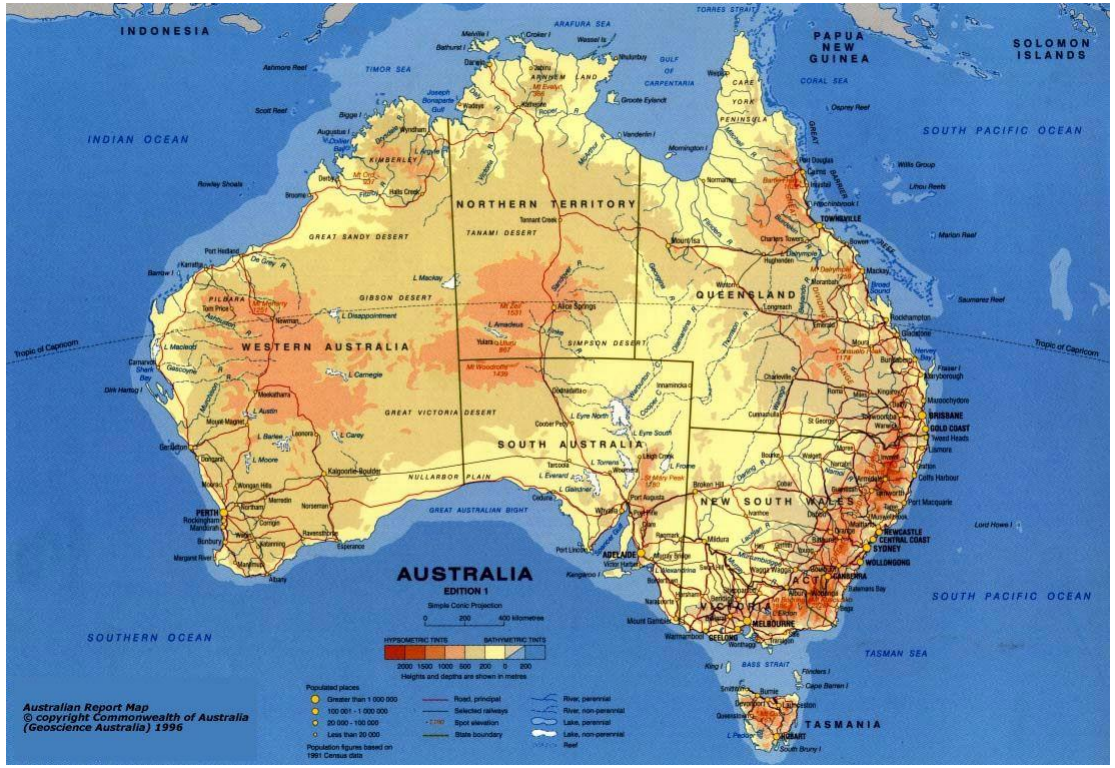
1. Building a ***process*** with participation and good governance – dialogue, accountability, industry policy.

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.