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## Manufacturing hopes rest on union-supported co-operative ventures

Australian unions have endorsed the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) support for co-operative operations, recognising the critical role they play in advancing the organisation's Global Employment Agenda and promoting decent work.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the 2012 ACTU Congress had endorsed the position in support of co-operatives as they had a proven record of creating and sustaining employment, now providing more than 100 million jobs globally.

"Co-operatives have also been more resilient to the deepening global economic and jobs crisis than other sectors," Ms Kearney said. "Trade unions and co-operatives have a long association in this country. Industry based credit unions gave workers access to financial services and loans, and co-operatives provided affordable services for key workers such as childcare, housing and health."

The motion adopted at the Congress supports the ILO's position on co-operatives, outlined in Recommendation 193. The resolution acknowledges the importance of co-operatives in job creation, mobilising resources and generating investment, as well as their promotion of economic and social development to the benefit of their members.

Ms Kearney said a good example of how co-operatives fostered decent work was Earthworker Co-operative, a micro-financing venture aimed at resourcing manufacturing start-ups including Eureka's Future Workers Cooperative destined for Morwell, Victoria.

Earthworker Co-operative project officer Dave Kerin said that as future jobs began to disappear out of the power industry, it made sense that co-operatives had higher productivity and better work environments as employees were co-owners.

The Eureka Future Workers Cooperative, which starts manufacturing of its solar hot water units in Knox, Victoria, in July, was the first of a series of union-based worker-owned renewables manufacturing businesses to be rolled out across the nation.

Factories are planned in the Hunter region in NSW, Geelong and WA. The model is unique because of a distribution system where units will be purchased through the wages component of the enterprise agreements negotiated between unions and companies with incentives paid out of rebates.

"Australia's International Year of Co-operatives Secretariat now seeks to partner with the ACTU to progress the development of a strong social sector of the Australian economy," said Melina Morrison, Director of the International Year of Co-operatives Secretariat. "Trade unions and co-operatives share sustainable employment agendas."

The ACTU Congress backing of the resolution follows the introduction last week of new national co-operatives legislation which aims to strengthen the sector by removing restrictions on co-operatives doing business in other states and territories.

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