

in most of its outlets shutting down throughout the country.

From 25 outlets, it has...

...leading up to the commencement date in January 2027.

He said the deal is one franchise...

The current Big Rooster locations

A Big Rooster outlet with its loyal mascot standing guard. PICTURE SUPPLIED

...at Marochy are inside Vision City, Rainbow, Waigani

Shop, Boroko, Konedobu and in Marobe Province at Lae Top Town

Fragmentation and frustration for energy workers

BY BEN RADLEY, FLORA CARRUTHERS and CHONGINAN MOANG

WORKING conditions in PNG's energy sector have changed significantly in recent decades as the sector has undergone partial privatisation, diversification and growth.

In addition to the emergence of private producers alongside the state-owned energy utility PNG Power Limited (PPL), an off-grid subsector is gathering momentum through the roll out of solar home systems and solar and hydro mini-grid micro-grids.

As a result, energy workers are no longer employed by one organisation, as was the case with the former State utility ELCOM in the 20th century.

Today, PNG's energy workers la-

bour across more than a dozen different firms focusing on the provision of both grid and off-grid energy from a range of different sources.

Recently, we interviewed 35 workers alongside 17 sector stakeholders, to better understand working conditions and the lived experiences of workers in PNG's energy sector today.

Of the 35 interviewed workers, 19 were employed by PPL and 16 by private firms in solar or hydro.

Two findings stood out from the data we analysed. First, common across nearly all workers we spoke to, whether a linesman at PPL or a solar product shop assistant, was a strong sense that wages were insufficient to meet their monthly needs let alone allow for savings and investments.

Second, in a departure from historic conditions under the State-owned utility, PNG's energy sector workers today are highly fragmented, not only across different organisations both private and public but also across the formal-informal divide.

For around two-thirds of PPL's 1800-strong workforce, job security remains high through permanent contracts, income is stable and predictable, and a range of benefits including the superannuation scheme are provided (although some reported these benefits are slowly eroding away).

For others, most notably PPL's casualised workers and the growing number of technicians, retailers and other workers in PNG's growing off-grid sector, life is more precarious. Workers often operate with short-

term or no contracts, earn highly variable and unstable incomes, and receive limited or no benefits.

Efforts by informal energy workers to organise through unions or worker associations to improve conditions appear isolated and nascent, frustrated by the lack of resource and support to scale.

Meanwhile, for unionised workers at PPL, the PNG Energy Worker Association reports facing increasingly hostile treatment from both PPL and the PNG Government in recent years.

New forms of organising under such circumstances will likely be required.

It is to be hoped, at the least, that the rights of energy workers engaged in labour organising activities will be respected and upheld.

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