communication workers union
CWUnion
SA & NT
TELECOMMUNICATIONS
E-BULLETIN
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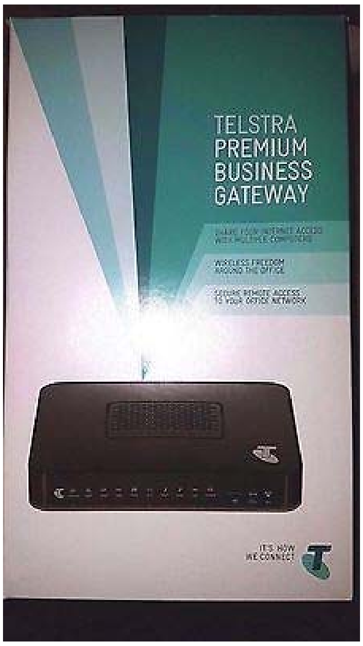
Telstra banding dispute goes to FWC

Thursday March 16, 2017

The CWU's dispute with Telstra over the correct grading of Service Delivery Field Technicians went before Fair Work Commission (FWC) Vice President Catanzariti again.



The dispute involves a number of technicians who are currently classified as CFW4s despite the fact that they are typically performing what the CWU argues is complex work involving the configuring and testing of routers for business customers.

Although it is the grading of these specific members which is in dispute, the issue potentially affects as many as 200 Communication Technicians.

The CWU has been pursuing this issue directly with Telstra over a considerable period of time and has met with the company on two occasions earlier this year over it.

We have not been able to reach any resolution however.

At the most recent hearing, Telstra tried to rely on the views of a witness who the company said was an expert in the Hay classification system on which the current Work Stream Job Descriptions are based.

Vice President Catanzariti pointed out, however, that the witness' credentials as an expert had not been established so his evidence could not be given "expert" weight.

Telstra is now required to produce any relevant further documentation in relation to the case before the next hearing.

Optus Single Service Desk: FWC hearing

The CWU appeared before Commissioner Johns at the Fair Work Commission on Monday 6 March in relation to a dispute we have lodged on behalf of Optus members.

The dispute arises out of a restructuring of Optus' help desk functions which has resulted in employees taking on extra duties with inadequate training and no extra pay.

Optus' position to date has been that the changes in duties don't warrant a change in employees' banding levels and that under the Optus salary structure, actual pay within each level (except for the floor) is at the discretion of Optus.

The CWU of course believes that more complex and demanding work should attract higher pay.

Optus Single Service Desk: FWC hearing (cont)

At the 6 March conciliation conference, the FWC directed Optus to re-examine the job descriptions of the employees involved to see whether they adequately reflected the work they are now performing.

Optus is to provide the CWU with any revised version of these job descriptions. It must also provide details of any relevant training that it proposes to deliver and details of any remuneration reviews that it has conducted since the employees took up their current roles.

This information will form the basis of further attempts by the CWU to resolve this matter with Optus. If no progress is made the issue will go back to the FWC, probably next month.

Telstra redundancies: National Fibre Networks Team

The CWU met with Telstra on 1 March to discuss redundancies in the National Fibre Networks (NFN) Delivery Team.

Much of the NFN Delivery Team's work in recent times has been centred on provision of fibre links to mining companies. NFN has also been involved in the construction of some of the fibre elements of the NBN project.

With demand in these areas now falling off, Telstra says future work volumes will not be enough to sustain the current 5 plough teams. The company has moved to reduce the number of teams to 3 with the result that 15 positions have been made redundant.

Telstra reported that it has to date had 7 volunteers for redundancy. Assuming these are accepted, the remaining 8 redundancies will be determined by the group selection process.

The CWU emphasised the importance of trying to identify redeployment opportunities for these employees although as the work involved is largely civils, opportunities may be limited.

Any CWU members affected by these redundancies and wanting advice about redeployment should contact their state branch.

Silcar Communications to make revised EA offer

The CWU and other employee representatives met with Silcar Communications on Thursday 2nd March in an attempt to resolve outstanding issues in the current round of Enterprise Agreement (EA) negotiations.

Management advised that in response to employee feedback it had revised its offer, with a key change being a restructuring of the payments for the proposed working hours buyout.

These payments are being offered in exchange for employees agreeing to move from a 36 ¾ hour week to a 38 hour week. Silcar Communications had previously offered an across-the-board lump sum payment of $3,000 per employee for this change.

Silcar Communications to make revised EA offer

The company is now proposing a schedule based on the current classification structure so that the amount being offered will more closely correspond to the impact of the change on individual employees.

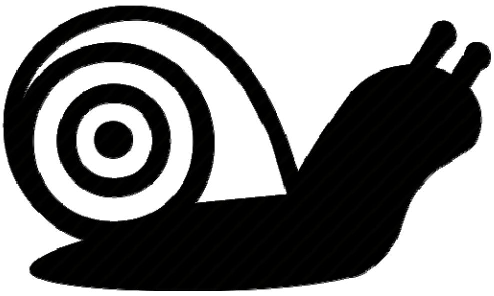
A separate uniform lump sum payment is still being proposed for the buyout of overtime.

The company has also made an improved offer on redundancy payments.

Details of this offer are to be put to employees in a further round of consultations scheduled for the week

ACMA Enterprise Agreement update

The latest meeting in the long-running negotiations for a new Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) agreement was held on Thursday 2 March.



Unfortunately, little progress was made at the meeting. ACMA management says it is keen to make progress in negotiations and to have another vote on an agreement within the next few months.

But at the same time they are saying that the offer that was made in December last year is the best possible given the Government Bargaining Policy (GBP).

As reported in E-bulletin #2, that offer was rejected by a solid majority of ACMA employees.

The CWU and other bargaining representatives have advised ACMA that it needs to change its approach if it wants to get a YES vote up.

We have urged management to go back to the start and revisit the current EA, making only those changes that are absolutely necessary to satisfy government policy.

Negotiators have pointed out that a number of agencies have been able to make Enterprise Agreements within the GBP framework without stripping back key employee entitlements and conditions, the agreements covering air traffic controllers and staff at the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) being two examples.

All those involved in bargaining have agreed that they will examine these two agreements prior to the next meeting on the 16 March.

Telstra’s plans for Network of the Future take shape

Telstra has announced a number of initiatives that are designed to lay the foundations of its Network of the Future.

The move puts flesh on the bones of CEO Andy Penn’s announcement last year that the company would spend some $3.3 billion on network enhancements over the next three years. Last October, Telstra said it currently had only 20% of the network which it would need by 2020.

Telstra now says it will partner with Ericsson to expand its national long distance, metro and regional networks to equip them to handle the huge growth in traffic expected over that period and to provide the basis for a range of advanced mobile and fixed services.

According to Telstra, the programme also includes:

- 5G New Radio trials leading to early 5G launch readiness;
- creation of a media delivery cloud to complement the existing Telco Cloud project (now carrying live traffic); and
- deployment of Australia’s largest Internet of Things (IoT) network.

The Network of the Future is central to Telstra’s attempts to position itself as a leading-edge digital services provider across big data, cloud and media fields. Unlike past large scale network upgrades, however (the Future Mode of Operation, even the 3G roll-out), this one will be highly software intensive and labour-lite – as will the Network of the Future itself.

And while the programme will boost the capabilities of Telstra’s fibre assets, the focus at the access network level is of course on wireless.

E-bulletin readers interested in this development can find more details here.

Telstra, nbn to automate more processes

Modern telcos have not yet eliminated all need for manual intervention in their operations…but they are working on it.

Telstra has recently flagged its intention of automating its internal procurement and supply chain processes in job advertisements seeking Intelligent Process Automation (IPA)-savvy applicants, especially those with experience of Blue Prism software.

Blue Prism, a specialist in Robotic Process Automation (RPA), boasts of itself as delivering the “world’s most successful digital workforce”, automating “high-risk, manual, rules-based and repetitive tasks” and radically improving “agility, efficiency, accuracy and compliance”.

Phew! And radically reducing labour costs as well.

According to industry analysts, Kinetic Consulting, the cost savings of replacing an Australian “back office” worker (i.e. someone who performs “rules-based” and repetitive tasks) with an artificially intelligent software robot could be as high as 90 per cent.

Carriers call for NBN write-down (cont)

Even offshore workers won't be able to compete, with RPA providing the same functions at around 50% of those workers' costs.

Meanwhile, industry newsletter it News reports that nbn is also advertising for senior staff to drive IPA adoption across all its internal processes. It intends to establish an internal "hub" to coordinate IPA-based initiatives as they are rolled out through the company.

Such initiatives are early signs of the wave of automation that is set to hit workplaces around the world over the next few years. As always, telco is one of the sectors to experience these trends first, but the coming tsunami will leave few industry sectors untouched.

It will require a more considered and coordinated national response than is visible on the policy horizon to date.

Women still working for less, report shows

Australian women are still earning far less than men, despite a small narrowing of the gender wage gap over the last 12 months.

The annual Gender Equity Insights report, released in time for International Women's Day, revealed the gap between men and women's salaries dropped from 23.9 per cent in 2015 to 23.1 per cent in 2016.

But researchers who worked on the report said that the change reflected the current downturn in the economy rather than any major improvement to the deeper imbalance between men's and women's earnings.

Factors such as the slowdown in the mining sector, in particular, will have affected the results, as fewer male employees are now enjoying the relatively high earnings that have been on offer in recent years.

The fact is that the wage gap has remained pretty much the same for decades.

It largely reflects the relatively low value put on much work typically performed by women, though obstacles to women's advancement at higher levels of professional work are also a factor in the results.

The gender pay gap between top managers, for instance, was $93,000, a

Women still working for less, report shows (cont)

difference researchers said probably reflected “unconscious biases”.

The author of the report, Professor Alan Duncan said closing the gap would require a “fundamental look” at the way companies paid their staff. But is also requires, among other things, a fundamental rethink of the notion that “women’s work” is intrinsically of lower value than men’s.

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If you have any questions on any of the above articles, please contact an official at the Union office on (08) 8443 7389.

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