

1. **Operations redundancies make no sense says CWU**
 2. **Enlarged role for Telstra in NBN construction?**
 3. **Telstra NBN training continues**
 4. **NBN Co ready to negotiate new agreement**
 5. **Telstra asbestos is unfinished business says CWU**
 6. **Telstra reports improvements in redeployment rates**
 7. **CWU members say yes to Inmarsat agreement**
 8. **Emergency services agreement finalised**
 9. **Australia: the country of the fair go - for some**
 10. **Hands Off Aussie Post: CWU campaigns to protect postal services**
-

OPERATIONS REDUNDANCIES MAKE NO SENSE SAYS CWU

The CWU has again queried the workforce strategy – or lack of it – that is leading Telstra to shed staff in Operations at the very time that NBN work is almost certainly coming its way.

Press reports on Monday 31 March claimed that Telstra was on the verge of signing a contract to build 300 FTTN nodes as part of the National Broadband Network (NBN) roll-out. Industry sources suggest the number could be even larger.

Contract negotiations are said to be still underway. But as the reports point out, the federal government is under pressure to start getting runs on the board.

Some initiatives to re-boot the NBN roll-out need to be taken now even if all the details of any new deal with Telstra aren't fully sorted out.

Yet at this very time Telstra is making employees with network construction experience redundant, including designers and project managers whose skills are in short supply.

The CWU has made new representations to Telstra about the short-sightedness of these job cuts.

It has also pursued reports from the field that Telstra is continuing to use contractors in Operations areas where its own staff are being made redundant. Telstra had previously given assurances to the CWU that it was only using contractors in circumstances where it no longer had the internal resources to do the work.

Members who have any information about the use of contractors in areas experiencing redundancies should contact their state branch.

ENLARGED ROLE FOR TELSTRA IN NBN CONSTRUCTION?

A contract to build some 300 FTTN nodes may only be the beginning of Telstra's wider involvement in NBN construction work according to industry watchers.

The Coalition is yet to release detailed plans for the roll-out of its multi-technology NBN. But with Fibre to the Node (FTTN) set to be at the centre of the mix, Telstra is well positioned to play a major role in the next phase of construction.

That could include being involved in network design – an area where NBN Co has to date experienced major difficulties – but could also extend further into overall project management, at least in relation to the FTTN components of the network.

“[Telstra] really understand this technology well,” industry analyst David Kennedy says, “and they understand their own copper network better than anyone else.”

Well, yes.

According to the *Australian Financial Review*, NBN Co's principal contractors might also be happy to deal with Telstra as a project manager rather than directly with NBN Co. After all, their experience to date has scarcely been positive. Several have made major losses on their contracts and the project is of course littered with the bones of smaller sub-contractors.

“The contractors do an enormous amount of work for Telstra,” one source is quoted as saying. “It's hugely appealing from a risk mitigation point of view to get Telstra to project manage all of that.”

The CWU has argued repeatedly for an enlarged role for Telstra in the NBN roll-out. Telstra should not put that opportunity at risk by continuing to shed the staff it needs to undertake the task.

TELSTRA NBN TRAINING CONTINUES

The CWU met with Telstra on 25 March for an update on its NBN-related training programme. The programme, funded by the Commonwealth, forms part of the Definitive Agreements for the NBN negotiated in 2011.

Under the terms of the training deed, Telstra must report on progress to the Department of Communications on a quarterly basis. Representatives of the Telstra unions – the CWU, CSPU and APESMA – also attend the meetings.

Telstra has told the unions that it ran 19 courses in the Sept-Dec 2013 quarter, with 2489 employees receiving training in that period.

For the Jan-March 2014 quarter the number of courses was higher (44) but the number of those trained was lower, reflecting peak load work demands on sections of the workforce eligible for the training.

The CWU urges members who have been seeking retraining but have not yet had an opportunity to get it to contact their state branch.

Telstra reports that the training programme is proving to be popular, with waiting lists for some courses like those that deliver skills relevant to the Telstra Platinum programme. Employees are also being brought up to speed with premises cabling skills relevant to NBN installations, including any needed to meet the new ACMA requirements.

NBN CO READY TO NEGOTIATE NEW AGREEMENT

NBN Co has notified employees that it wishes to begin negotiations for a new Enterprise Agreement (EA) for technical staff. The relevant staff are those employed directly by NBN Co, not by its contractors.

NBN Co has a number of separate agreements – four in all – covering different sections of its directly employed workforce. All were negotiated in 2010 and all come up for renewal this year.

The NBN Co and CEPU Technical Employees Agreement 2010-2014 is the only one of the agreements in which the CWU is involved. It reaches its nominal expiry date in August.

Under current workplace laws, the CWU will become the “default” bargaining representative for its NBN Co members. Members have the right to nominate a different representative if they want to but otherwise the CWU automatically becomes their bargaining rep.

NBN Co members are encouraged to contact their state branches if they have specific issues they want addressed in this coming round of bargaining.

NBN Co employees covered by the Technical Employees Agreement who are not yet CWU members are encouraged to **join up now** to have a say in the negotiations.

TELSTRA ASBESTOS IS UNFINISHED BUSINESS SAYS CWU

The Asbestos Taskforce established under the former federal Labor government has been disbanded.

But the asbestos issue has not gone away. There is still plenty of asbestos in Telstra infrastructure – in ducts, pits and exchange buildings – presenting a hazard for Telstra employees and others working on the Telstra network.

The Taskforce was set up in response to concerns about the handling of asbestos in Telstra ducts and pits during the construction of the National Broadband Network (NBN). Both the Communications Division (CWU) and Electrical Division (ETU) of the CEPU have been represented on the body.

E-bulletin readers will recall that the Taskforce engaged 14 independent monitors, some of whom were CWU members. The monitors were jointly funded by Telstra and NBN Co and were in addition to the 135 inspectors trained up and deployed by Telstra.

With the end of the 6 month funding period, the work of these independent monitors has stopped – as has the oversighting activity of the Taskforce as a whole. As a result there is no longer a body to which Telstra has to report regularly on its compliance with OHS requirements in relation to its network remediation programme.

The CWU has indicated that it expects to continue to receive up-to-date information on that programme and on compliance levels, which had improved under the scrutiny of the Taskforce. The obvious danger is that without such scrutiny the old short cuts and dangerous work practices will return.

Any member who witnesses or is made aware of such practices should report the matter to the CWU along with any evidence that can be provided.

TELSTRA REPORTS IMPROVEMENTS IN REDEPLOYMENT RATES

Telstra has told the CWU that there has been some growth in the number of successful redeployments in the company, although many staff still prefer to take a package when faced with redundancy.

The CWU has long been concerned about the availability of retraining and redeployment opportunities for Telstra staff. That is why the union supported the increased emphasis on redeployment in the most recent Enterprise Agreement – while at the same time insisting that no-one should be forced to accept a job they didn't want to do.

The CWU recently asked Telstra for information about the rates of redeployment under the new arrangements which require all employees facing redundancy to participate in a transition programme before either finding a new job in Telstra or leaving the company.

Telstra has advised the union that the percentage of employees facing redundancy who actively seek redeployment has risen by up to 10%. Of these, well over half are successfully redeployed in the company.

A large majority of employees, however, still prefers simply to take a package and leave. No doubt, as Telstra argues, the age-profile of the workforce contributes to this trend as may the scale of the (union-negotiated) benefit.

It must be asked, though, whether changes to workplace culture such as increased electronic monitoring (GPS) and performance-based pay schemes, in which staff have little confidence, are also helping to determine employee choices.

There is surely a message to management in the fact that so many employees choose to take the money and run.

CWU MEMBERS SAY YES TO INMARSAT AGREEMENT

CWU members working at the Inmarsat land earth station in Western Australia have voted to accept a new Enterprise Agreement.

The agreement, negotiated by the WA branch, provides for an 8.5% pay rise over three years and an equivalent rise in allowances. The increase is significantly higher than the company's standard 2% per annum rises.

The agreement also includes a number of above-award conditions, including a 36 ¾ hour week and an entitlement of up to 40 weeks redundancy pay.

Inmarsat is a global satellite company initially established to provide telecommunications services to the maritime industry. It was privatised in 1999.

The CWU believes that the company's WA employees are currently the only ones who have the benefit of a union-negotiated agreement.

EMERGENCY SERVICES AGREEMENT FINALISED

The fight for an agreement for Victorian emergency services staff is at last over.

After a protracted dispute, the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) Enterprise Agreement has been signed off by the CWU, the United Firefighters Union (UFU) and United Voice.

The earlier ESTA agreement expired in June 2012 and when negotiations were unsuccessful the Police, Fire and Ambulance Call takers, Dispatchers and Team Leaders voted to take protected Industrial Action.

During the dispute, the employer- backed by the State Government - applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to terminate the industrial action not once, but twice and failed on both occasions. The FWC determined that there was no evidence that our members' protected industrial action (in the form of bans) constituted a threat to members of the public or to their safety.

By late last year, after conciliation, agreement had been reached on most claims. But the employer then proceeded to put an agreement out to employees without the endorsement of the three unions involved. The proposed agreement, which would have suppressed career progression, was voted down by members, even though many were weary and wanting a pay rise they hadn't received since 2011.

This stunned the employer who readily agreed to go back to FWC and continue where negotiations had been left off. An agreement was reached and the unions obtained their career progression claim.

In a difficult climate, where state government wages policy dictates increases of no more than 2.5% unless financial improved productivity is gained, Victorian CWU members at ESTA have achieved increases of between 9% and 16% increases over the next few months.

The short agreement expires in June 2015.

AUSTRALIA: THE COUNTRY OF THE FAIR GO - FOR SOME

A \$27 wage rise per week for our lowest paid workers is essential if Australia is to avoid creating an underclass of working poor unions say.

The ACTU last week lodged its claim with the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for a \$27 per week wage increase (or 71 cents an hour boost to lift the minimum wage to \$17.08 an hour) for Australia's lowest paid including cleaners, retail and hospitality staff, child care workers, farm labourers, and some factory workers.

The annual minimum wage review is the only chance for a pay increase for 1.5 million of Australia's lowest paid workers, and helps set the pay and pay increases of many more.

Australia is becoming a high cost country to live in and for low paid workers it's getting harder and harder to get by. Someone on a minimum wage of \$622 per week barely has enough to cover their basic costs.

But predictably the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is willing to offer just \$8.50 extra a week, while the Australian Industry Group has offered \$10.

Minimum wages: the key facts.

- *The Minimum wage is currently \$622.20 or \$32,355.44 a year.*
 - *The Minimum Wage is now just 43.3% of the average full-time wage (AWOTE), the lowest on record. Five years ago, the Minimum Wage was 46.9% of the average. Five years before that, the ratio was 48.2%.*
 - *Two decades ago, Australia's minimum wage was nearly 60% of average full time wages, ten years on it was hovering around 50%.*
 - *The rise in the incidence of low pay is particularly sharp and concerning. In 2002, 13.8% of Australian full-time workers had earnings below two-thirds of the median; by 2012 this had risen to 18.9%.*
-

HANDS OFF AUSSIE POST: CWU CAMPAIGNS TO PROTECT POSTAL SERVICES

The CWU has launched a campaign to defend Australia Post's services from cost-cutting and to warn of the dangers of privatisation.

Recent moves by Post to extend delivery timeframes to rural and regional areas are just the thin edge of the wedge, the union believes. Also under pressure is the daily mail service which could in future be cut back to 3 days a week.

Technological change – especially the internet – is changing the way people communicate and do business. But the CWU believes the answer to falling letter volumes is the expansion of Post's services in new areas, not cutting back on the old ones on which many people still rely.

The CWU also rejects the idea that privatising Post would somehow solve the challenges that the traditional mail service faces.

There is little doubt that some in the federal government would like to see part or all of Australia Post sold off, if for no better reason than to help deliver on the Coalition's budgetary agenda.

But there is no evidence that the privatisation of services such as post, or telecoms or electricity has brought better services or lower prices. On the contrary!

The CWU's telecoms members will also know what privatisation means for jobs and for working conditions. Since Telstra was partially privatised in 1997 the company has shed tens of thousands of jobs, with full-time domestic employee numbers having fallen by around 60%.

E-bulletin readers are urged to get behind the Hands Off Aussie Post campaign ([#HOAP](#)). You can start by visiting the campaign website at www.handsoffaussiepost.org.au.