

E-BULLETIN Telecommunications

#21. Friday, 15 November 2013

1. Redundancies: Telstra confirms it will seek volunteers.
2. CWU pursues Telstra over employee access to RDOs.
3. Click Locate and Whole of Day: some questions answered.
4. Bringing it back home: Telstra “in-sources” alarm monitoring.
5. Health and safety fundamental in vehicle policy says CWU.
6. Telstra’s Greg Adcock goes to NBN Co.
7. Telco old hands appointed to NBN Co Board.
8. NBN roll-out: is aerial the answer?
9. Go home on time on Go Home on Time Day.
10. Unions condemn Coalition cuts to CSIRO funding.
11. The human cost of Walmart.

1. Redundancies: Telstra confirms it will seek volunteers

Telstra has told the CWU that it intends to proceed with its proposal to seek volunteers for up to 300 redundancies in Customer Service Delivery (CSD).

Telstra first flagged the proposal in late October, following its decision to revise the number of redundancies that it initially planned to implement in CSD. Following representations by the CWU about those cuts, Telstra decided to retain about half of the 233 positions initially slated for redundancy.



Retaining skilled workers in CSD is really an operational necessity for Telstra, given both current and likely future workloads in this area.

But that doesn’t stop the cost-cutting pressures coming from the top of the company.

The CWU has told Telstra that it does not consider voluntary redundancies to be an acceptable solution to these conflicting demands.

While voluntary redundancies will usually be preferable to forced ones, we simply do not see how Telstra can afford to lose 300 more jobs from CSD.

That is why the CWU has asked Telstra where it thinks the cuts will in fact be made. We have also asked to be provided with information about the use of contractors/agency staff in areas where volunteers are being sought.

The union is seeking this information prior to the meeting on 21 November at which the union anticipates Telstra may indicate that it intends to proceed with the actual redundancies. To date it has not been provided.

2. CWU pursues Telstra over employee access to RDOs

The CWU has taken the question of Telstra's scheduling of Rostered Days Off (RDOs) to the Fair Work Commission.

The dispute has arisen as a result of Telstra's decision to close off opportunities for Monday RDOs for field-based staff and severely limit them on Fridays. This move appears to reflect the company's ongoing difficulties in meeting "peak load" demand for installation and maintenance work.

The CWU and Telstra appeared before Commissioner Gregory for mediation of the issue on Tuesday 12 November. The CWU is arguing that Telstra breached the current Enterprise Agreement by introducing changes to RDO schedules without prior consultation with the union.

Telstra is arguing that the new arrangements don't amount to "major" change and so don't require consultation under the terms of the EA.

On the recommendation of FWA, a further meeting between Telstra and the CWU was held on Thursday 14 November, attended by Telstra workforce planning and HR representatives. At the meeting Telstra undertook to provide more data on workflow issues to the CWU.

In the meantime, members who believe there is no business case/work flow justification for changing their RDOs should contact their state branch with details.

In cases where there are personal reasons for not being able to change, members should first advise their 2 up manager of the issue and then contact their state branch if the matter is not resolved.

3. Click Locate and Whole of Day: some questions answered

Telstra has responded to the CWU on a number of issues we raised about the use of GPS data to monitor employee activity.

The new Click Locate and Whole of Day initiatives will track the locations and activities of Communications Technicians in the field and match that data with ticket of work and job completion information.

The CWU has raised concerns about the practicality of some aspects of the programmes as well as about the use of the data for disciplinary purposes.

Telstra has now told the CWU that:

- There will be no change to current start or end of day procedures. Current log on arrangements still apply.
- Current ETT processes continue to apply.
- There is no "three strikes and you're out" policy in relation to non-compliance with the new 2 km radius rule for completions.
- Telstra has developed a rule to deal with suspended jobs. If a CT picks up a previously suspended task and works on it for less than 10 minutes before completing or not completing the ticket of work, then it will not be checked for compliance. The second last job would then be checked for End of Day compliance in its place.



- CTs working in areas without coverage within the “2 km radius” zone won’t automatically find themselves non-compliant. As long as the ticket of work is “completed” on-site it can be “finalised” via Toolkit either on-site or once coverage is reached and still be compliant.

Members experiencing problems with the implementation of either of these programmes should seek more detailed information and advice from their state branch. Attempts by management to use Click Locate or Whole of Day data for disciplinary purposes should be reported to the union immediately.

4. Bringing it back home: Telstra “in-sources” alarm monitoring

In a reversal of the general trend, Telstra has decided to bring work currently being performed by contractors back in-house.

In an announcement from Grant Nicholson, Director, Network Assurance Operations, Telstra has told staff that Alarm Monitoring Centre (AMC) functions currently performed by Silcar will be brought back into Telstra Service Operations at the Global Operations Centre (GOC).



Telstra alarm monitoring work currently performed by Silcar will be brought back in-house.

Telstra says that the decision reflects efficiencies that it has identified as part of an AMC review, in particular ones that might be achieved “through the introduction of automation and standard Telstra ticketing systems and processes within the power & facility environment”.

“These changes would deliver a number of benefits including an improved customer experience through reduced handling, standard process implementation and the ability of service groups in Telstra to more easily see power-related impacts. “

The decision suggests that, in this case at least, the productivity gains that Telstra is always seeking will be achieved through greater internal process efficiency, not simply by trying to reduce labour costs through outsourcing.

The decision will, of course, affect the CWU’s Silcar members working at the GOC, many of whom are former Telstra employees.

The CWU has had an initial discussion with Silcar about the impact of the decision on these members and about options available to them.

Silcar has undertaken to continue these discussions next week.

5. Health and safety fundamental to vehicle policy says CWU

The CWU is continuing in discussions with Telstra over the suitability of certain vehicles for use in rural and remote locations.

As reported in E-bulletin #20, a CWU member was involved in an accident while trialling a Toyota 4 wheel drive vehicle in the Northern Territory. The vehicle rolled while travelling over a loose dirt surface.

Fortunately the member was not injured but the CWU nevertheless takes the incident seriously – as must Telstra.

Since reporting the story in the last E-bulletin, the CWU has received a number of comments from members on this issue. Some members have indicated that they like the Toyota's V8's greater pulling power but have also reiterated concerns about handling arising from the narrow rear track.

The union encourages and welcomes this feedback. But whatever the merits or shortcomings of any vehicles that may be used by Telstra, the one thing that is fundamental is safety, especially for those working in remote locations.

This is the issue that the CWU is insisting must be dealt with in any decisions Telstra makes about its vehicle purchases.

6. Telstra's Greg Adcock goes to NBN Co.

One of Telstra's key NBN-interface executives, Greg Adcock, has been appointed Chief Operating Officer of NBN Co.

Adcock has a close knowledge of the NBN project, having been part of the team that negotiated the Definitive Agreements between Telstra, NBN Co and the Commonwealth. Until this move, he was head of the group within the reorganised Operations Division which has responsibility for NBN-related activities and services.

According to the headlines in several media reports, Adcock was "poached" by NBN Co. The reality is almost certainly less of a cloak and dagger business than this suggests.

NBN Co has failed to meet roll-out targets to date, not least because the largest and most experienced telecommunications design and construction company in the country was allowed only a strictly limited role in the project.

Malcolm Turnbull cannot afford to repeat this mistake. If the Coalition is to make good on its targets it will have to give Telstra a more central role in what is – and always had to be – essentially an upgrade of its own network.



But getting the project moving again is also in Telstra's interests because it will speed the flow of payments it receives for customer migration to the NBN.

The Adcock appointment should be a win-win move and has been on the cards for months. It is hard to believe that there have been any surprises here.

7. Telco old hands appointed to NBN Co Board

The Coalition make-over of the NBN project continues with three new appointments to the NBN Co board, all of them people with substantial experience of the local telecommunications industry.

Justin Milne was Managing Director of Big Pond and later added digital media to his responsibilities at Telstra during Ziggy Switkowski's time at the company. Prior to going to Telstra he had also worked for Microsoft and for Malcolm Turnbull's Ozemail.

Martin Flanagan's experience has been on the construction side of the industry, having joined contractor Skilled Engineering in 1990 and become its Executive General Manager in 1998. He subsequently established Service Stream before moving to NBN Co as head of construction in 2009.

He left NBN Co in the midst of the collapse of the original construction tenders in 2011.

Simon Hackett is the founder of Internode which he headed until its sale to iiNet last year. Since the beginning of the NBN project he has been one of the most outspoken commentators on it from within the industry.

While generally supportive of the Labor government's Fibre to the Home model he has been a consistent critic of the wholesale pricing structures that accompanied it.

Between them, these three have a close knowledge and hands-on experience of the on-line, telco construction and ISP/reseller businesses – something that has been absent from the NBN Co board to date.

8. NBN roll-out: is aerial the answer?

The Tasmanian government has called on Communications Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, to consider an aerial roll-out of Fibre to the Home as a low-cost option for the NBN project.

The suggestion, which the federal government says it will consider, has drawn some support from electricity utilities, including Tasmanian supplier Aurora which played a key role in the early phases of the Tasmanian roll-out.



The various state electricity companies showed an early and keen interest in the NBN project, not least because pole access charges could have provided a source of funds for their own infrastructure renewal.

But the negotiation of the Definitive Agreements with Telstra, which gave NBN Co access to underground infrastructure, put paid to these hopes – at least in the main.

Those Agreements still stand and Telstra has indicated it has no intention of seeing them unpicked. So would it really be more economical to now pay pole access charges on top of these existing commitments?

Even setting this question aside, the early experience in Tasmania where a substantial element of the early roll-out was aerial, suggests that it is not necessarily a cheap option.

But wait - there's more! Existing overhead infrastructure in a Melbourne suburb. How much more will be tolerated?

According to NBN Co's own figures, the cost per premises passed was \$5,000 for the Tasmanian pre-release sites and \$4,000 for the Stage 2 sites – some distance from the \$1200 target set in the 2012-2015 corporate plan.

Last but not least there are the issues of visual "pollution" and infrastructure security to be considered. The appearance of a third or possibly fourth overhead cable may not be welcome in many suburbs.

And in a time of increasingly frequent extreme weather events, putting more critical national infrastructure on poles hardly seems the way to go.

Rather than embracing the aerial option it seems more likely that the Coalition will see an enlarged role for wireless in Tasmania. But it will be nevertheless be interesting to see how much attention is actually given to this proposal in the current 60-day roll-out review.

9. Go home on time on Go Home on Time Day

Next Wednesday, 20 November is Go Home in Time Day – a day when working people are urged to pack up, down tools and refuse to work the unpaid overtime that is becoming normalised in our society.

In Australia, unpaid overtime amounts to \$109.6 billion a year or 7.4% of GDP. This is a donation from the working people of the country to their employers.

Why do it? A large part of the answer is the growth of insecure employment together with relatively low levels of unionisation in the services sectors.

But this trend is putting increasing strain on working people and their families. One in every two Australians reports spending less time with families and friends than he/she would like because of work.

Make 20 November a day when you take back the time which belongs to you and no-one has paid you for. It's yours and it's precious.

10. Unions condemn Coalition cuts to CSIRO funding

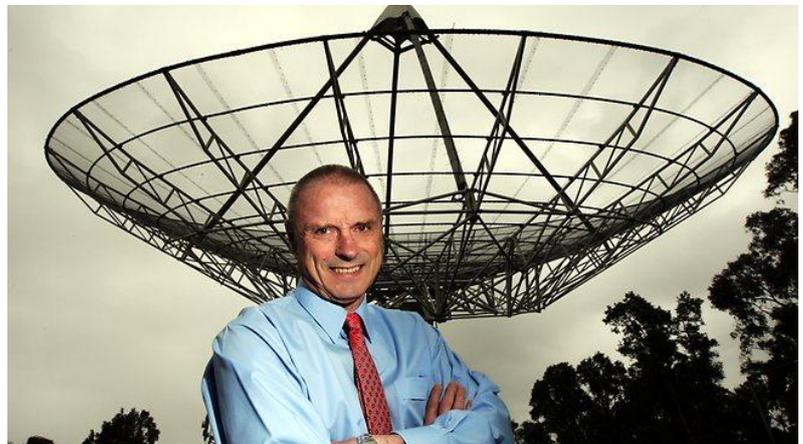
The union movement has responded with alarm to the Coalition's decision to impose a job freeze on the CSIRO as part of its wider attack on the public service.

The freeze will immediately affect 550 casual and term positions but could mean the loss of up to 1400 such positions by the end of the year.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said, "Cutting jobs at the CSIRO will be bad for productivity in the long run."

"Our national productivity growth depends on innovation and research, and the application of that research in the development of new products and new technologies."

As far as the telecommunications sector goes, CSIRO is now one of the few public institutions in Australia where such research takes place.



CSIRO electrical engineer John O'Sullivan, inventor of key technology inside nearly every WiFi device, pictured with CSIRO radio dish at Marsfield in Sydney. Picture: Renee Nowytarger Source: The Australian -

With the effective dismantling of the Telstra Research Laboratories during the 1990s, when Telstra was privatised, the torch has largely passed to CSIRO.

During the 1990s CSIRO developed and patented the algorithms and processes for Wi-Fi.

More recently it has given a central place to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) research through the creation of the Digital Services and Productivity Flagship earlier this year. The Flagship has set itself to examine ways that ICT can boost productivity as the resources boom tapers off.

"In this day and age, can Australia really afford to have a government who doesn't value scientific research and innovation?" Oliver asked.

"This is an important question people need to consider."

11. The human cost of Walmart

What is the story behind the cheap clothing retailed by such global giants as US-based Walmart?



Union Network International (UNI) explores the realities of Walmart's global supply chain, from US retail employees with wages below the poverty line to the super-exploited workers who make the clothes in China and Bangladesh.

The message? The anti-workers strategies of such global corporations can only be countered by global action and cooperation by the labour movement.

See the human cost of Walmart's \$5.97 t-shirt at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZC4neLax5o>.



Download our CWU phone app



We welcome your comments and contributions –
 send us an email and let us know what you think via cwu@cwu.org.au
 Check out our webpage at www.cwu.org.au