

E-BULLETIN Telecommunications

#22. Friday, 28 November 2014

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1. CWU meets with Telstra on workforce management

The CWU has met with Telstra to discuss the development of a new workforce management framework for the company.

According to Telstra, the aim of the system will be to allow it to better track the activities, skills and experience of its employees as well as to identify skill gaps and future skill needs.

It will, Telstra hopes “help us work smarter, make better use of our people’s skills, and provide better career opportunities.”

In the CWU’s view, any development which allows Telstra to better plan and coordinate its internal workforce development policies is to be welcomed.

It is a source of ongoing frustration to the CWU to see skilled staff who should be regarded as an asset to the company being made redundant rather than being retrained and redeployed.



There is also a clear need for Telstra to identify the new areas of work that are emerging for telcos and to ensure it understands the workforce issues raised by its ongoing transition from a plain old telephone company to a multi-product digital service provider.

But the CWU also believes that Telstra needs to take stock of the impact of its outsourcing and offshoring practices on the company’s capabilities. The issue here is not only the redeployment of those made redundant. It is the consequences of such decisions on Telstra’s performance, especially in the area of customer service.

Telstra continues to be in denial on this subject but it should be a key issue for the company’s workforce planners along with the retention and development of its current staff which the CWU, of course, strongly supports.

2. Telstra announces domestic violence policy

Telstra has announced a new domestic violence policy to coincide with White Ribbon Day, the national day when men speak out against violence against women, especially within the context of the family.



Telstra's Family and Domestic Violence Support policy will provide employees with up to 10 days paid leave to attend medical appointments, attend counselling sessions, receive legal advice or undertake other activities related to their experience of family/domestic violence.

This leave is over and above personal/carer's leave, although under the policy personal/carer's leave may also be accessed by those experiencing domestic violence if more than the 10 days domestic violence leave is required.

An employee supporting someone experiencing domestic violence may apply for carer's leave.

The leave is not cumulative, year on year, and is not available to casuals on a paid basis, only unpaid. And because it is provided for by policy, rather than being part of an award or enterprise agreement, the entitlement is not enforceable. So the actual amount of leave any employee gets will be at the discretion of management.

The CWU nevertheless welcomes Telstra's adoption of this policy which marks an important step towards making domestic violence leave a recognised workplace right like sick leave and parental leave.

3. NBN Co releases new corporate plan

NBN Co has released its 2014-17 corporate plan amid continuing uncertainties about its ability to meet both construction and financial targets.

The plan is, in fact, really only a plan for the next 12 months – an interim report pending the finalisation of the reworked Definitive Agreement with Telstra and renegotiation of the HFC arrangements with Optus. With the move to the Multi-Technology Mix (MTM) approach adopted by the Coalition government, the fate of nearly 7 million premises (out of a total of 12.4) will depend on these negotiations.

In the absence of certainty in these areas, there is not much point trying to set forward looking targets. So much of the plan is taken up reporting on current roll-out progress.

Much of the focus over the last 12 months has been on addressing problems related to the Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) roll-out, both in greenfields and brownfields (existing) locations.

Here the problem of "service class zero" premises has been a priority. These are premises which have been "passed" by the network but are not connected to it – meaning that customers can't get a service even if they are in an area that has been deemed ready for full cutover to the NBN.



It is still not clear whether NBN Co has access to the skills it needs to meet roll-out targets.

Such a situation may produce good “homes passed” figures but it’s hardly good for business. As well as retro-fitting lead-ins to current service class zero premises, NBN Co is now requiring its construction partners to adopt a “build drop” method i.e. provide the lead-ins at the time the local network construction work is being done.

This will, of course, require a different skill mix in construction teams. It is not clear how readily prime contractors will be able to meet these new workforce needs.

4. NBN EA negotiations update

As reported in E-Bulletin #21, the CWU and other relevant unions have become concerned over a slowdown in Enterprise Agreement (EA) negotiations with NBN Co.



Since mid-year the CWU has been involved in discussions for a new agreement covering NBN Co technical staff. Despite disagreements, including some over the scope of the EA, negotiations were progressing normally. For the last 6-8 weeks, however, NBN Co has been missing in action.

The CWU has recently made further representations to NBN Co in regards to continuing EA negotiations. NBN Co have now advised the CWU that they will be providing us with a formal written response in the very near future. Hopefully this response will see a return to good faith bargaining.

The CWU and other involved unions will be meeting next week to consider any response and how to best progress NBN Co negotiations.

5. Asbestos: unions will challenge James Hardie on compensation

Unions have agreed to launch legal action against a bid by James Hardie's asbestos compensation fund to start paying victims in instalments rather than lump sums.

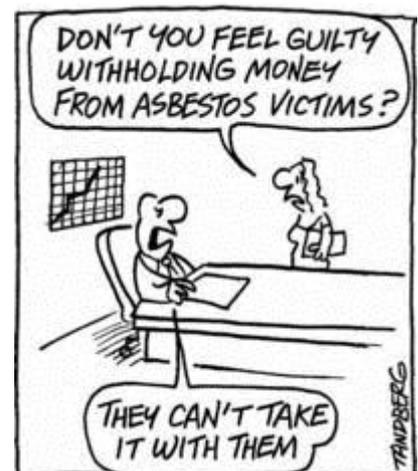
At its most recent meeting, the ACTU executive voted for legal action blocking James Hardie’s Supreme Court application to pay out sufferers in instalments.

The application came after the Asbestos Injuries Compensation Fund, bankrolled by James Hardie Industries, announced it was heading for a cash shortfall of \$184 million by 2017 after underestimating the number of people dying because of toxic asbestos.

ACTU secretary Dave Oliver said the average sufferer of the fatal asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma died 155 days after being diagnosed.

"Asbestos victims do not die by instalments and should not be paid in instalments," Mr Oliver said.

Rod Smith, whose wife died of mesothelioma in 2011, condemned the application to start paying instalments as "unconscionable" and one that "goes against everything the hard-fought agreement was set up to do".



Mr Smith said that if his wife had not been paid out in full, he would have been unable to stop working to nurse her full time at home until she died.

"I was with her at home, she died at home, and having money allowed us to do that," he said.

The ACTU has also called on the NSW and federal governments to honour their commitments to make a loan facility available to the compensation fund in the event of a remaining shortfall.

Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*.

6. China free trade agreement raises job concerns

Unions have voiced concerns that the terms of the free trade agreement reached with China may pose a threat to local workers' jobs and conditions.



***ACTU President Ged Kearney:
government needs to come clean on
details of China agreement.***

ACTU President Ged Kearney said that the Abbott government was being "deliberately vague" about the detail and likely impacts of the agreement.

The deal which will allow Chinese firms to bring in workers for infrastructure projects of \$150 million or more through new labour agreements called Investment Facilitation Arrangements (IFAs).

The government says that the IFAs will have rules similar to those for 457 visas and won't involve any weakening of current requirements to give priority to local workers. But unions remain to be convinced.

"The Abbott Government claims Australian jobs will be protected because the current rules on labour market testing — that genuine skills shortages must exist and jobs have to be advertised locally before foreign workers can come in — will apply to the Chinese deal," Ged Kearney said.

"Apart from the fact that these current labour market testing rules are woefully inadequate, the Government's own information on the trade deal doesn't even make this guarantee clear."

"There are more questions than answers, she said, "and the Government needs to come clean and explain what this deal means for Australian workers."

7. Australian women earn 25% less than men

A newly released study of wages in Australia has found that women are continuing to earn less than men despite formal pay equality.

The gender equality scorecard released today by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) shows that the average base pay for women in medium and large companies is 19.9% lower for women than men, while total remuneration is 24.7% lower.

The largest gender gaps for base and total remuneration are in the finance and insurance sector, with gaps of 28.4% and 36.1% respectively.

Part of the problem, according to the report, is the relative lack absence of women from management positions, especially at higher levels.

Women comprised only 27.8% of executive and general manager roles in Australia, and at the top management level, chief executive, women held 17.3 per cent of positions.



But unions have also pointed to lack of workplace flexibility, pressure for longer working hours and the difficulty of finding affordable childcare as underlying issues affecting women's earning power at all levels of the workforce.

The ACTU has called on the federal government to increase funding for childcare and to support the improvement of wages and conditions of childcare workers as major steps in improving women's workforce participation opportunities.

It has also called for Gender Equality reporting and training requirements to be strengthened.

8. Work/life balance gets harder

Working more and enjoying it less?

If the answer is "Yes" chances are you're one of the nearly 5 million Australian's whose work/life balance has deteriorated over the last five years.



A recent study by the Australia Institute, "Walking the Tightrope" found that 42% of workers considered that they were finding it harder to strike a healthy balance between the demands of work and other aspects of their lives.

The most commonly cited explanations for the problem were longer working hours and unpaid overtime. Job insecurity was also a major factor.

The report says that Australians "donate" almost \$110 billion through 58.8 million hours of unpaid overtime every year, representing 14.7% of all hours worked, which it claims is "more than twice the hours required to provide employment for

unemployed Australians".

Significantly though, the reports found that most workers did not want reduced hours and/or greater flexibility if it meant a reduction in pay.

Of course not! With the cost of living, especially of housing, rising and wage growth slow, few working people can afford to take home less.

And they shouldn't need to. The whole idea of the standard working week is that it provides a good living wage, while the restriction on hours worked also helps ensure that there is work for everyone.

In fact as productivity increases through developments in technology, everyone should be able to work less – not more as is happening today.

Readers interested in reading the full Australia Institute report can find it at [Walking the Tightrope: Have Australians achieved work/life balance?", The Australia Institute, November 2014.](#)



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