



# MEMBER UPDATE

## AFPA Three Year Anniversary EA Bargaining Update

Dear members,

Today marks three years since your last pay rise on 8 March 2015. This is an appropriate point to provide an update on the approval process for our EA and undertake a frank assessment of the enterprise bargaining process along with the likely federal industrial relations landscape into the future.

There has been no communication received from the Fair Work Commission (FWC) since Friday, 9 February 2018. At that time, it was indicated the approval process would commence the following week. Further, FWC's own targets point to all Agreements being approved within 12 weeks of lodgement. The AFP Agreement was lodged for approval on 19 December 2017. Even allowing an extra week for Christmas, our EA should be approved by 21 March 2018 according to FWC's own deadlines. I wrote to FWC yesterday requesting an update and will pass on to you any information I receive.

There have been some objections to the approval of the Agreement lodged with FWC by other bargaining parties. No objections have been lodged by the AFPA, nor are we contributing to any of the matters raised. In terms of delay, there has been no information from FWC to show the approval process has commenced, so these various objections could not presently be considered to have delayed any approval. Dealing with any objections will necessarily involve information being presented formally to the Commission, however, in my assessment there is no reason the other approval processes cannot occur in parallel.

Enterprise Bargaining in the current federal system involves a process systematically engineered to disempower employees. Management of the entire process is in the control of employers and ultimately any proposal may be put to employees for consideration which the employer sees fit, regardless of whether it is supported by employee representatives. In recent times, employers have successfully argued for the abolition of Enterprise Agreements during the course of bargaining, with the result that employee entitlements reverted to the relevant award conditions. This means employees are immediately worse off and is surely a tactic designed to show 'how good they have it'. In contrast, the situation of the threatened strike action by Sydney Rail employees being disallowed by FWC shows how difficult it has become to use one of the few tools available to employees to apply pressure during bargaining.

The industrial relations system is so troubled overall that in the September quarter last year, the number of employees covered by Enterprise Agreements fell by 170,000. Over the past several years, the number of employees working to award conditions has increased by nine percent. Make no mistake, collective bargaining is the most effective way to deliver ongoing industrial benefits to employees. The trend away from collective bargaining is disturbing.

In addition to these systemic issues, we also have the government's Workplace Bargaining Policy to contend with, and we have all been witness to how this impacts upon the bargaining process. Frustratingly, the government has signalled its intent to maintain the current process by continuing the Bargaining Policy in its current form, including a two percent cap on salary increases. At the same time though, the federal treasurer bemoans the low wage growth environment in this country whilst presiding over a system which has entrenched low wages growth

in the Commonwealth Public Service for several years to come. As the nation's largest employer, the Commonwealth needs to be showing the way with wages growth, particularly when the figures quoted above indicate the private sector is disinclined to make up the difference.

Take the opportunity to voice your concerns to your federal representatives – we simply want access to what John Howard described as a “comfortable and relaxed” lifestyle. This can only be achieved in a fair industrial environment that delivers reasonable wage growth.

Cheers,

Graeme



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