

Telstra Enterprise Agreement 2015

Bargaining Bulletin #8

24 June 2015

The 9th regular meeting in this round of Enterprise Bargaining was held on 23 June. The meeting continued discussions of issues that had been already put on the table ie Telstra's extended shift proposal and questions of redeployment and reassignment procedures.

Telstra also flagged possible changes to the dual Workstream/Job Family arrangements in the current Enterprise Agreement (EA) and responded to our proposed changes to existing rest breaks provisions.

Extended shifts.

Regular Bulletin readers will now be familiar with this issue which involves Telstra's proposal to introduce shifts of varying lengths beyond 10 hours and up to (and including) 12 hours. As reported previously, the fundamental issue here from the CWU's point of view is that performance of such shifts must be voluntary.

Telstra has accepted this position. What remains is some further fine tuning of the wording that will sit around the new arrangements as regards health and safety and calculation of relevant entitlements. The parties hope to be able to finalise these matters shortly.

Reassignment/redeployment.

As reported in Bulletin #7, Telstra has told the CWU and other bargaining representatives that it now wants to maximise retention of its skilled workforce rather than have a continuation of the large-scale redundancies of the last 15-20 years.

This was a theme during the last EA negotiations. Bargaining then resulted in some changes to the redundancy procedures ie automatic entry into the redeployment programme. Telstra now wants to revisit the issue, particularly in light of the NBN-related work opportunities that are becoming available.

The CWU of course supports Telstra's participation in activities that will provide ongoing work for our members. But the union also recognises that for some Telstra employees facing redundancy, redeployment/reassignment into new roles is not viable. Indeed, the CWU understands that at present only a minority of those entering the redeployment programme actually take up new roles.

The CWU has suggested that this trend needs to be analysed carefully before any changes to the current redeployment and/or reassignment provisions in the current EA can be considered.

Discussions on the issue are ongoing.

Work Models.

During the last EA discussions, Telstra expressed its clear preference for having its Job Family work model adopted throughout Telstra.

In the end, however, it was agreed that Workstream arrangements would continue in areas where they currently existed, at least for present employees. But new employees would be enrolled into the Job Family except for CFWs who would have a choice.

Telstra now wants to remove this choice (the “dual offer”) for new entrants into its field workforce.

Telstra recognises that although the majority of its employees are now on either individual contracts (AWAs/ITEAs) or on the Job Family section of the EA, Workstream arrangements are the preferred option for both existing and new CFWs. But it argues that, over time, it needs to flow its Job Family model, based in performance pay, through the whole company to maximise productivity and competitiveness.

Even in the negotiations for the last EA, Telstra out forward a model that would have seen a larger component of Workstream employees’ pay based on their individual performance.

CWU members have consistently resisted the performance-based pay system that is at the heart of the Job Family model. And the CWU continues to argue that the apparent “productivity” benefits of performance-based systems are illusory, as they are often paid for through a decline in both work quality and employee morale.

This discussion also has some way to run.

Rest breaks.

Lastly the meeting dealt with the CWU’s proposal that the rest break schedule that formerly applied to Directory Assistance (DA) workers should be reinstated. This would bring their schedule into line with those that apply in the Emergency 000 Contact Centre.

Earlier this year, Telstra implemented provisions in the current EA that allowed them to bring rest breaks in DA centres into line with those in other Telstra customer contact centres, other than Emergency 000. This resulted in a reduction of rest time of some 60%.

Telstra has rejected the CWU proposal, despite direct representations from Directory Assistance employees outlining the increased work pressures and risks that are arising from the reduction in their rest breaks.

The CWU and other Telstra unions will now consider their options, given Telstra’s stated position. We remain committed to finding a solution to the problem that is acceptable to DA members and other affected employees.