

Telstra Enterprise Agreement 2015

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The most recent meeting of the Telstra Enterprise Agreement negotiators was held on Tuesday 4 August. The CWU was represented at the negotiations by newly-elected national divisional officials Shane Murphy and John O'Donnell with support from Divisional Office staff.

The meeting was the 15th in this round of negotiations. Over the course of these discussions a significant degree of agreement has been reached and the Telstra unions have been successful in ensuring that there will be no change to most core conditions such as hours of work, penalty rates, leave and holidays and, of course, the 80 weeks redundancy payout.

However no agreement has yet been reached on two major issues: redundancy and reassignment processes and the future of the Workstream work model.

Redundancy/reassignment/retrenchment.

As reported in earlier Bulletins, Telstra says it wishes to minimise future job losses by redeploying/reassigning staff whose roles are redundant rather than retrenching them. The CWU supports this objective – but with one major qualification: such redeployment should, in the last instance, be voluntary.

Job security was among the priority issues identified by members in the run-up to this round of negotiations. The CWU completely rejects the suggestions being made in some Telstra communications that it and the other unions are not serious about protecting members' jobs.

In fact for the better part of 40 years, the CWU has campaigned strongly against job losses in Telstra and the rest of the telecommunications industry, whether those losses were the result of technological change, or privatisation/deregulation or of outsourcing and offshoring. So it is not for Telstra to preach to the unions about employment security.

Redeployment to be voluntary.

Equally, though, the CWU is aware that for some CWU members retrenchment is genuinely a better option than redeployment. This may be so for older workers, especially for those who have worked in physically demanding roles or feel uncertain about their ability to develop new skills.

Members have also expressed their concern that if redeployment is compulsory they may be put into roles they can't perform and then performance-managed out of the company without any redundancy payout.

These are the reasons for the CWU continuing to argue that, whatever new procedures are adopted, it is the employees who must have the final say about whether proposed new roles are "suitable" for them – or whether they prefer to be retrenched when their jobs are redundant.

These issues are still under discussion.

Workstream model

It is no secret that Telstra prefers its Job Family work model to the Workstream arrangements which still apply to most CWU members.

As members will know, performance-based pay is at the heart of the Job Family model. Basically, it is designed to allow management a very large degree of discretion over how much employees get paid and so a greater ability to control their behaviour and output.

When surveyed by their unions, Telstra employees continue to say that they find the system unfair and that the goals set for them are often arbitrary and unrealistic.

These are among the reasons why the CWU and its members have rejected this pay system – and related grading model – for so long. This is also why new employees coming into Telstra – at least into the Customer Field Workforce – continue to opt for Workstream arrangements.

Telstra now wants to move towards a single pay/grading model by closing the Workstream option off to new employees. Current Workstream employees would not initially be affected by this and employees who are currently on AWAs would continue to have the option of coming onto the Workstream, at least for 12 months.

But Telstra's proposal would mean that, over time, Workstream arrangements would cease to exist.

And even in the medium term, as the numbers of Workstream employees fell, their conditions would come under greater threat in future EAs. At present there is safety in numbers.

The CWU has said it is willing to discuss the development of a single work model during the life of this next agreement.

Have your say.

These two matters will be discussed further at the next meeting of the negotiating teams on Thursday 6 August.

The union seeks feedback from members now on these two particular issues. Contact your state branch or the national office at www.cwu.org.au.