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EB NEWSLETTER

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**WE WON'T BE RUSHED INTO ACCEPTING A SUB-STANDARD AGREEMENT.
WE WILL TAKE WHATEVER TIME IS NEEDED TO ENSURE WE GET A FAIR PACKAGE.**

State Government Agenda

The state government has changed the industrial laws to advantage them during bargaining and arbitrations. They have embarked on a job threatening agenda and scare campaign designed to incite the public against public sector workers and to scare public sector workers into accepting trade offs of their employment rights.

This is an aggressive agenda which goes far beyond any rationale to balance the budget books.

Members may remember over 3 years ago, prior to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), prior to the flooding disaster, and prior to Peter Costello's political 'audit' of state finances, members of the then opposition and now government, campaigned about culling the public service of so-called 'de-necessary' jobs.

I have never known an incoming government of any particular persuasion, state or federal, that hasn't immediately conveniently found a surprise 'black hole' in the budget which means they have to renege on pre-election promises and pursue their particular political agenda.

Members need to know that a threshold element of the state government's bargaining demands is not even about money, the budget, the 'black hole', Greece, debt or any financial issue whatsoever.

The government is demanding that all consultation arrangements be abolished and replaced with 'managerial prerogative' and that we return to the dark days of 'Do as I say, you're paid to work not to think'. This would have massive permanent effects on your working life and rights to raise any issues of concern.

There are a raft of other demands pushed by the government which all involve removing any arrangements involving 'mutual agreement', your input, or your right to say 'no' to anything.





These government demands have got nothing to do with money.

The fact that the government is playing hard ball and running a scare campaign does not mean we should be spooked into abandoning the claim for a fair bargaining outcome, nor should we be intimidated into giving up our rights to fairness and respect at work. Nor will we be rushed!

This round of bargaining has only just commenced and we need to explore whatever opportunity we can to reach an agreement and not just consider the government's opening demands on a 'take it or leave it' basis. These demands are not solely being made by government, many have been designed by the QFRS. We have not yet been informed of all of the details and I am staggered by the many proposed changes to our current agreements being demanded by QFRS.

These major changes include rosters and movements which the employee will not have a say. This is only part of the so called 'Management Prerogative'.

Negotiations

The negotiations will be difficult and the government is demanding sweeping changes for a modest wage rise.

The government has offered to backdate any wage increases to the expiry of the current agreement if agreement is reached by the end of July.

I want us to closely and carefully analyse and consider each and every change the government is demanding and also take the time to prosecute our issues on behalf of members.

I will be working very hard to ensure that negotiations are thorough. This round of bargaining is one of the most critical we have encountered and, if we change our current certified agreement we will be stuck with its replacement for some time.

We need to take the time to make sure we get the agreement right and that all changes are clearly understood by each and every member. The devil is in the detail.

The back pay option should not be a high priority.

Wage rises

I acknowledge that so called inflation levels are falling, general wage increases are falling and we will have a struggle to win fair wage rises.

The government's publicised "2.7%" offer is not as simple as it may sound. The figure is a maximum remuneration change dictated by government and is linked to trade offs of your rights and in most cases is incorporated into an 'aggregated wage', so the net figure could actually be less than 2%.





We are definitely not at the stage where we have a simple choice as to whether we accept or reject a modest 2.7% wage rise. We are at the very earliest stage in a complex negotiation where we need to work through a whole raft of QFRS demands to change our current conditions and the current agreement.

Any suggestion that firefighters are holding out or demanding substantial wage rises when others are losing their jobs is wrong. That is a picture the government is trying to manipulate. This is obvious from the minor differentials in headline wage offers to different public sector workers and the public scare campaign.

Aggregate wage

The centrepiece of the QFRS wages proposal is to introduce an aggregate wage. This option is still being refined by QFRS. In essence it involves an expansion of the rolled up rate to include average public holiday penalties, 2.5% flexibility allowance, meal and travel costs, and 5 overtime shifts paid at time and a half (150%).

The government proposal would involve advance payment of 5 overtime shifts at 150% so that an officer could be required to work 5 additional shifts without extra pay before normal overtime pay kicks in. The theory being that the officer has already been paid at 150% for those 5 shifts in advance.

Similarly work performed on public holidays would not attract extra pay because it would have been paid in advance. There would be no payment for regular travel between locations and meal allowances as that too would have been paid in advance. The incorporation of the 2.5% flexibility allowance is suggested as buying out any future claims for allowances for changes in our work.

Superannuation and sick pay would not be paid at the higher aggregate rate.

There is no agreement at this stage to any form of aggregate wage. Your union has only recently received the QFRS proposal and is still working through it with QFRS.

We are prepared to consider the proposal and negotiate in good faith in amongst a consideration of members' issues and the rest of government demands.

We will not rush into an aggregate wage option however; it needs very careful analysis and consideration, just like all of the rest of the issues which are subject to negotiation.

What next?

We have set further meetings next week to discuss UFU issues.

It is early days and we have only had a couple of meetings since negotiations started.

It will be difficult and complex but I would expect we should have made progress by 1 August 2012.





I have met with the United Voice - the ambulance union, in relation to the current environment facing emergency services and community services personnel. We expect that ambulance personnel will also come under government pressure to give up their rights and entitlements and believe the two unions should work more closely together to protect our members.

Members need to maintain their patience and solidarity during these difficult times and be prepared to get involved in securing a fair result.

41 Days to go!

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