communication workers union CWUnion National

# E-BULLETIN Telecommunications

## #20. October 2016


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## 1. CWU meets with Telstra on Wideband Design redeployment

The CWU met with Telstra on 20 October to discuss redeployment options for Wideband Design employees facing redundancy.

The meeting followed representations made by the CWU before the Fair Work Commission (FWC) the previous week. Although that hearing did not result in any change in the number of roles being made redundant, it did highlight the need to try to ensure that there were alternative jobs for those wanting them.

E-bulletin readers will recall that the site function closures involved in these redundancies were in Netley (SA), Ballarat (Vic) and Hobart (SA). At the meeting on 20 October, Telstra reported that it had received applications for 10 Wideband roles across regional Victoria, Melbourne and Hobart available to redeployees and were in the process of advertising a further 7 roles.

Expressions of Interest in a further 14 roles in Networks and NBN were also being sought, with the jobs being located in Adelaide, Ballarat and Hobart. A number of these roles were secondments, with the potential for, but not the guarantee of, becoming permanent.

The CWU is continuing to monitor the redeployment process closely. Any members wanting to stay with Telstra and not getting support from management in seeking redeployment should contact their state branch.

## 2. CWU to monitor new CSD workforce management system

As reported in E-bulletin #19, Telstra has informed the CWU that it is trialling a new workforce management system to replace Connect.

On Friday 21 October, state branch and national CWU officials attended a briefing on the new system, known as Promise, based on the Click solution. Members may already have some knowledge of Click which is currently used in scheduling, but under the new system all modules will be based on Click.

Telstra says it has a number of objectives in moving to a new system, including simplification of the processes involved in field workforce management and service delivery, reduction of the number of different devices used by CTs and, needless to say, increased productivity.


The shortcomings and inefficiencies of Connect are well known to the CWU and its members. They are among the reasons for the union's criticisms of performance monitoring and assessment in the field workforce, with individual performance often relying on factors beyond employees' control.

It remains to be seen, though, to what extent Promise will be able to overcome problems which may be inherent in such systems such as absence of local knowledge, inefficiencies related to the issuing of single rather than batched orders and inadequate/inflexible forward planning.

Time will tell.

The trials will commence in Adelaide and Melbourne at the end of October, with Adelaide using the new system and Melbourne running a parallel "control" trial using the existing one. The trials will involve both Telstra and ISGM technicians. With an eye to the future, they will be focussed on work Telstra is performing under contract to nbn ie the Copper Sub-Loop Agreement (CSLA) under which Telstra provides maintenance services for copper in those areas of the FTTN roll-out which have not yet been declared fully Ready for Service.

The CWU will be involved in monitoring the trials but CWU members involved are also encouraged to contact their state branches.

## 3. Silcar (Visionstream) Telecommunications: proposed EA close to finalisation

After close to a year of negotiations, a new Silcar (now Visionstream) Telecommunications Enterprise Agreement is nearing finalisation.

Bargaining for this new agreement was initiated by the company in late 2015, with the CWU becoming involved in January 2016.

Since that time we have seen the rejection by employees in May of one proposed agreement and a swathe of redundancies in mid-year.

Finalisation of a reworked agreement has been recently delayed by the need to have the new draft vetted for compliance with the federal government's building codes and by some technical difficulties that have arisen around the tax treatment of allowances.

At this stage no firm date has been set for a vote on the new agreement but if the outstanding matters can be resolved the company is hoping to hold a ballot by mid-November.

If it is supported by employees, the agreement will include back pay from 30 December 2015.

## 4. Silcar Communications: EA rethink?

Negotiations between Silcar Communications and employee representatives, including the CWU, are experiencing a lull, with a meeting scheduled for 20 October being postponed.


This follows feedback from employees on an initial proposal from Silcar management which was the subject of consultations earlier this month.

While employees at those meetings showed a willingness to continue to negotiate over a new agreement, there was a generally unfavourable response to the proposals being put by management.

Basically, management is offering to "buy out" a number of conditions in the current Silcar Communications Agreement which are above those in other sections of the consolidated Ventia/Visionstream conglomerate of which Silcar Communications now forms a part. These include a 36 ¾ hour week and double time on all overtime.

Employees are at this stage pretty much agreed that management has not put enough money on the table to convince them to trade off such entitlements. Beyond that, though, there is a feeling that it may be better to simply hang on to current conditions which, once sold, will be hard to win back.

Silcar management is now no doubt considering new options. The CWU has written to Silcar seeking a date for the next bargaining meeting. Members will be advised when negotiations resume.

## 5. ACMA negotiations grind on

There has still been no resolution of the long-running negotiations for a new Enterprise Agreement for employees of the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

Bargaining for a new agreement has now entered its third year! The last pay rise employees received (ie under their existing agreement) was on 1 July 2013.

Earlier this year, ACMA employees rejected a proposed agreement which delivered a 6% pay rise over three years.

With no extra money being put on the table and with no change in the government's requirements for conditions trade-offs, it is hard to see how any significant progress can be made.

The indications are, however, that ACMA will move to put an agreement out for ballot early next year.

## 6. Telco industry veterans call for NBN write-down

Two well-known participants in the telecommunications industry have called for a write down of the NBN as debate about the usage prices facing Retail Service Providers (RSPs) intensifies.

Bevan Slattery, the founder of a number of successful wholesale broadband businesses (Pipe Network, Megaport, Superloop) has been a critic of NBN pricing for a number of years.

Now he is proposing a new RSP usage charge of between $3 and $5 per Mbps – well below the current price of $15.75 and less than half the $10 level which nbn CEO Bill Morrow is forecasting for next year.

Such a drop in prices, Slattery says, is needed to encourage use of the network, particularly at the higher speed tiers for which, at present, there is little take-up. Some 75% of NBN users take up plans offering speeds of 25Mbps or less.

What's the point?

Of course the point is that the higher prices are necessary if the NBN is to make a commercial return on its (up to) $56 billion construction costs. But that aim will be self-defeating if the end result is underuse of the network.

Slattery suggest around $20 billion of the money spent so far may need to be written off to allow a workable wholesale pricing structure.  And former Telstra executive and industry insider, Bob James agrees.

"We need a much larger (wholesale) price drop," he says.

"Put simply, about half the cost of the NBN will need to be written off sooner or later for NBN wholesale prices to support globally competitive retail packages."

**Source:** ***Communications Day***

## 7.  Google Fiber winds back planned roll-out

Google Fiber, the project launched some five years ago to bring Fibre-to-the-Home to American cities, has decided to take a breather.

Announcing his own departure from the project, Google Fiber chief executive Craig Barrett said the roll-out in many US cities would be "paused" although it would go ahead in areas where it had already begun.


The announcement follows reports some months ago that the project was under scrutiny for failing to meet targets. At the end of 2014 Google Fiber was said to have about 200,000 subscribers, well short of its 5 year target of 5 million.

The roll-out has also been subject to considerable delays and, it would seem cost pressures, with Barrett said to have been told earlier this year to cut staff numbers by 50%.

In his farewell blog, Barrett indicated that Google Fibre would now be exploring "new technology and deployment methods" to ensure that the company stayed "ahead of the curve" in the delivery of superfast broadband.

That's probably code for wireless options.

Last month Google filed an application with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to test wireless broadband in 24 locations across the US using the 3.5Ghz band, favoured for superfast mobile broadband services.

And in June it also acquired WebPass, a small ISP that delivers point- to –point high-speed wireless broadband to residential buildings and businesses.

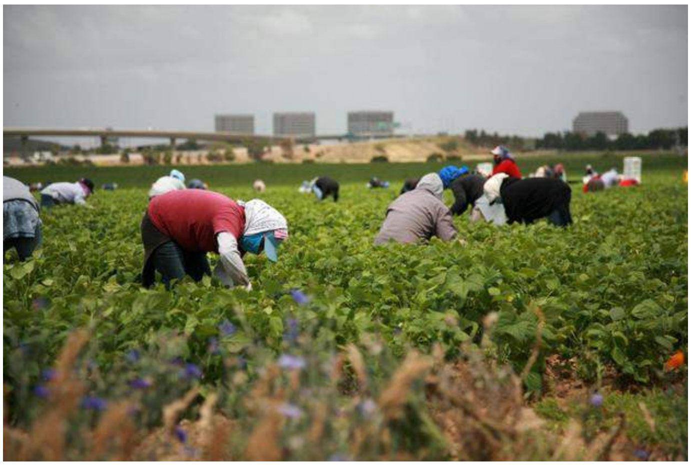
Whether fixed or mobile, wireless broadband is evolving rapidly and is providing an alternative “last mile” access technology that is both cheaper and easier to deploy than new fibre platforms, at least in “brownfield” sites.

Wireline broadband operators such as Australia’s NBN are yet to feel the full force of this wireless challenge, but with 5G just around the corner that challenge is certainly coming.

## 8. Victoria moves to regulate labour hire

The Victorian Labor government will introduce a licensing scheme for labour hire companies in an attempt to address the growing number of cases of gross exploitation of workers by labour suppliers.

The move comes in response to the release of the report of the Victorian inquiry into Labour Hire Industry and Insecure Work chaired by RMIT Professor Anthony Forsyth. The inquiry has made 35 recommendations for cleaning up this section of the labour market.



In his report, Forsyth says that the activities of rogue operators have led “to exploitation of vulnerable workers including underpayment of award wages, non-payment of superannuation, provision of sub-standard accommodation and non-observance of statutory health and safety requirements.”

"This problem stems in large part from the ease of access, or absence of barriers to entry, for persons/organisations wishing to provide labour hire services in this state.”

Forsyth has singled out the horticulture, meat and cleaning industries for immediate action in Victoria. Ultimately though, he says, what is needed is a national scheme.

Unions have welcomed the report, while pointing out that exploitation of workers through crooked labour hire arrangements is not confined to the three industries where licensing is proposed.

National Union of Workers (NUW) secretary Gary Maas says his union would have been happier to see the proposed licensing regulation covering all industries.

"Yes those industries are exploited, but other industries are exploited by the same sorts of labour hire companies," Maas said. He named charity fund raising, the dairy industry, and warehousing and logistics in particular.

Mass said 40% of people are affected by insecure work in Victoria and it "needs to change".

**Source: Workplace Express; Workforce Daily.**

## 9. Gender pay gap: no improvement in Australia in 20 years

The gap between men's and women's earnings in Australia has shown no significant change in the last 20 years, according to the latest report.

In recent years, the "gender pay gap" has been variously estimated in reports as between 16% and 18%. The new report by KPMG estimates the gap as being 16.2% and says the figure remains stubbornly high despite women's education levels, skills and length of time in the workforce being less important as contributing factors than they used to be.

So what's the explanation for the gap – given that the principle of "equal pay for equal work" has been established in law in Australian since 1969?


The answer, according to the report, lies first and foremost in "systemic" discrimination – the web of deep-seated social attitudes and behaviours that sees women commonly working in lower-paid jobs associated with the traditional "caring" roles.

"Women's work", in short. About 80% of the healthcare workforce, for instance, is female.

But more overt discrimination also plays a part, particularly in the promotion (or otherwise) of women into higher managerial roles. And women are also still more likely to have interrupted career paths as a result of taking time out of the workforce to care for children and/or the elderly.

Unions say that Australia needs to do more to ensure that women are properly rewarded for their work and more adequately supported in their working lives through measures such as paid parental leave and provision of affordable child care.

# We welcome your comments and contributions – send us an email and let us know what you think via enquiries@cwuwa.org

# Check out our webpage at www.cwuwa.org

Regards,

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