

E-BULLETIN Telecommunications

#5. April 2017

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1. CWU meets with Telstra on Design reorganisation

The CWU met with Telstra Friday 7th April in an attempt to resolve issues arising out of the proposed reorganisation of design and related service delivery roles in Enterprise Services. Earlier meetings were held on Thursday 30 March and Tuesday 4 April.



The changes proposed will lead to a loss of 55 jobs, in part through outsourcing of what Telstra describes as “low complexity, high volume orders” and in part through the proposed centralisation of design functions in three “centres of excellence” in Brisbane, Parramatta and Melbourne.

Over and above these job losses, the reorganisation will reduce the number of higher level jobs in some areas.

For instance, all designer roles will in future be graded as a CFW 6 (or Job Family equivalent) while at present there are 29 employees performing design roles at Band 7 and above. Naturally, this has led to a concern among union members and officials that roles are being downgraded and the value of certain skills reduced.

At the 7th April meeting, the CWU attempted to establish just what functions were now going to be performed by employees under the proposal and how they related to the functions in the current Job Descriptions, particularly to the distinctions between “external” and “internal” (or CAN vs Tech) which are used to differentiate between banding levels relevant to both the designer and appraiser roles in the new model.

Telstra has undertaken to clarify these issues, but their basic position is that both the designer and appraiser roles here relate only to work beyond the exchange ie CAN and related CPE. The CWU has reserved its position on these roles.

Other proposed bandings were less contentious, although the CWU considers that some of the higher level CFW roles in the new model (the Service Delivery Consultants and possibly the Service Delivery Lead) should be TWs.

Telstra has also undertaken to provide the CWU with further details of the training programme which it is proposed will accompany the restructure. It has also confirmed that it will be accepting volunteers for redundancy, although of course it reserves the right to retain employees who it sees as key contributors.

Lastly, it has told the CWU that it has no plans for further redundancies among the field staff, despite rumours to the contrary that are circulating in the workplace.

The CWU expects to have a more complete response from Telstra on the issues discussed at the most recent meeting by early in the week beginning 10 April.

2. Silcar Telecommunications employees vote YES to new EA

Employees at Silcar Telecommunications (now part of Visionstream) have voted strongly in favour of a new Enterprise Agreement – after a long wait.

Negotiations for the agreement, which covers what used to be known as SilcarTelepower, began in late 2015.

At that time there were well over 100 employees in scope. By the time the agreement actually went to ballot, the number of employees eligible to vote was 56. Of these 51 actually voted and of these 43 (84%) voted YES.



The agreement delivers pay rises of 2.5% per annum, two of which (including one as back pay) have already been paid in recognition of the fact that the hold-ups to getting the agreement approved were completely out of employees control.

It also offers protections against current staff being required to perform shift work, more sensible provisions around start of day arrangements and significant payments for staff on standby.

3. Visionstream announces job cuts

Visionstream has told the CWU that it may shed over 60 positions from Field Services Delivery as current contracts expire and work volumes decline.



Those affected will be both direct employees and labour hire workers. Around 22 jobs that are currently covered by either the Visionstream Field Workforce Agreement or the Silcar Communications Agreement are at risk.

A further 17 non-EA and 27 labour hire jobs are also likely to go.

Visionstream/Silcar failed to win NBN work when the Operations and Maintenance Master Agreements (OMMA) were announced in December 2015 and their current contract with the company for FTTN build expires in June. Visionstream says that they are also experiencing uncertainty and a drop-off in work in other contract areas.

Visionstream has been seeking expressions of interest for voluntary redundancies, although as usual it says that it will also consider its own requirements when making redundancy decisions.

Affected members should contact their state CWU branch.

4. Telstra reports on NBN training

The CWU met with Telstra late last month (24 March) to hear a report on NBN-related training activity under the government-funded training deed.

Members may remember that there are two purposes to this training programme – to retrain Telstra employees whose jobs could be made redundant by the NBN and to help provide appropriately skilled workers to that project.

At present much of the training being provided relates to the NBN contracts Telstra has won in design and operations/maintenance.



In Customer Service Delivery the main focus at present is on training in activation and assurance functions

related to the Customer Sub-Loop (CSL) and Operation and Maintenance Master Agreement (OMMA) contracts. Most of this is FTTN/FTTB work, although there is also some HFC training (focussed largely on South Australia) and ongoing FTTP training required.

In design, the incorporation of Fibre to the Curb (FTTC) in the NBN's suite of platforms means there is a need for training in this area in addition to the ongoing training in relation to other fixed wireline technologies (FTTN/ FTTB, HFC).

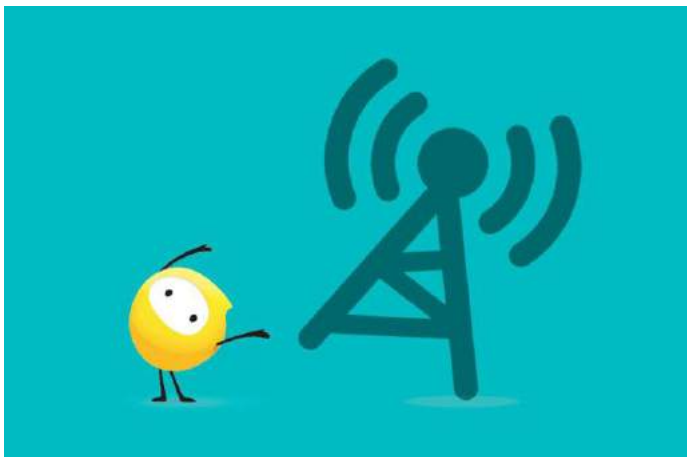
These design skills are heavily in demand at present but of course the NBN design work has a limited lifetime so it is important that longer-term opportunities and related training needs are also identified for current employees.

In the CWU's view, in-premises networking continues to represent a growth area, especially as the Internet of Things evolves. Telstra has already put its toe in these waters and needs to ensure that its internal skill development programme keeps pace with the commercial opportunities they represent.

5. Optus 2G shutdown begins

First Telstra, now Optus.

Optus has announced that it is commencing its 2G shutdown, with the first services being withdrawn as from April 3. Services in the Northern Territory and Western Australia will be the first to be affected, with a full service shutdown scheduled for completion by the end of August.



Telstra shut down its 2G network last year and Vodafone has said it will cease 2G services in September. All carriers have experienced the same fall-off in 2G usage as customers switch to 3G and 4G based smartphone services.

Indeed voice is increasingly an “add-on” in mobiles, with data now typically accounting for an ever-increasing proportion of total usage.

Mobile phones are now the most popular way of accessing the internet in Australia and mobile data traffic is predicted to grow tenfold in the next five to six years, with video traffic accounting for three quarters of this growth.

In 1991, when the first licences specifically for mobile were issued in Australia, 2G was still in its infancy. That time now seems a world away, such is the pace of technological change that has occurred – and is continuing to occur – since.

6. Unions push for \$45 minimum wage increase

Unions will argue for a \$45 a week increase in the minimum wage when the Fair Work Commission starts dealing with the annual minimum wage case later this month.



And, as usual, employer groups are arguing for less – quite a lot less in fact.

The Australian Industry Group is proposing a 1.5% increase which equates to about \$10 a week for a full-time worker.

The Australian Retailers Association wants a rise of only 1.2%. That's lower than the rate of inflation so would in fact mean a real wage cut! The Retailers are, of course, also sworn enemies of penalty rates.

If the unions' claim was accepted it would mean an increase almost three times as large as last year's 2.4% increase (just over \$15). But the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) say that that is what is needed if the ever-widening gap between the minimum floor and average wages is to be addressed.

In 1985 the minimum wage was two thirds of the average wage. Today it's less than 40%. The OECD recommends 60% as a benchmark if a country is to avoid creating a class of working poor.

Having 2.3 million workers living within sight of the poverty line is not only unfair to those workers – it is against the interests of the community as a whole.

While minimum wage earners tend to have jobs in sales or community/personal service areas, a low minimum wage is in fact a threat to all workers as it encourages a downward pressure on wage levels as a whole. And of course 2.3 million workers who are struggling to make ends meet hardly help drive the economy forward.

That is why the union movement as a whole supports the increase in the minimum wage, even if most of its members are doing better than that – in large part, indeed, because they are union members.

7. Senate moves to protect penalty rates

Proposed legislation to protect weekend penalty rates has passed the Senate and will now go to the House of Representatives, putting pressure on the Turnbull government on the issue.

The bill was introduced by Labour and co-sponsored by the Greens and the Tasmanian independent, Jackie Lambie.

It ensures modern awards can't be varied to cut penalty rates or the hours to which penalty rates apply if the change results in a reduction to a worker's take-home pay.

The move comes in response to the February decision of the Fair Work Commission to cut Sunday penalty rates for workers in the retail and hospitality industries by varying the modern awards that set their (minimum) conditions.

That decision has been deeply unpopular with the community and is regarded as one of the factors that contributed to the thrashing the electorate gave to the Coalition state government in the recent Western Australian election.

That unpopularity also explains why several former supporters of the cuts in the Senate – the Nick Zenophon Team, One Nation and independent, Derryn Hinch, changed their minds and voted for the bill.

ACTU President Ged Kearney says that the cross-bench must now do the right thing in the Lower House and support the proposed legislation.

“Without a government which is willing to stand up for working people, we need the crossbench and opposition in both houses to stand together to protect low paid workers in this country,” she said.



8. Behind the Samsung Galaxy: union busting and worker exploitation

Samsung's new Galaxy 8 smart phone is produced by an exploited and harassed workforce, according to an international trade union investigation into the company's aggressive anti-union employment practices.

The makers of Apple's i-Phone, Foxconn, have long been notorious for the appalling conditions that workers experience in its "factory cities" in China. But Samsung has received relatively less international attention.



Now a report by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has revealed how Samsung uses a combination of bribes, threats, bullying, dismissal and even kidnapping to keep its employees, and people working for its suppliers, under total control.

According to the report, 200 Samsung workers have fallen ill with leukemia, lymphoma and other occupational diseases, yet Samsung

refused to give details of the chemicals used in production until a district court ruled against the company's secrecy policy earlier this year. 76 of the workers, mostly in their 20s and 30s, have died.

A case brought before the International Labor Organisation (ILO), brought by the ITUC and other international and Korean trade unions, accuses the company of systematic surveillance and intimidation of workers, dismissal of union members, severing contracts with unionised suppliers, non-compliance with agreements, fictional contracting arrangements, and instructions to managers to violate labour laws.

The case also describes the lengths that Samsung goes to in its union-busting activities. It documents the case of a worker at Samsung's Ulsan service centre who was actually kidnapped by managers. The worker was made to get into a car and driven to an island tens of kilometres away, where his mobile phone was confiscated. Locked in a room, he was told that he would not escape the island unless he withdrew from the union!

Samsung's Galaxy 8 may not blow up or catch fire. But it is produced in conditions that are every bit as hazardous to its employees as the 7 was to end customers – a fact to be remembered when considering the new model.

Source: Union Network International.

**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,

Clinton Thomas
Branch Organiser – Telecommunications
0429 036 736