



NTPS FIRE-FIGHTERS' BULLETIN 5/2013

Background

Negotiations for a replacement NTPS Fire-fighters' agreement have been on foot since August 2013. Although both parties have made concessions during the course of negotiations, United Voice continues to advance claims that cannot possibly be accommodated, including initial wage increases of up to 23% per annum for some employees, followed by wage increases of 8% per annum and a housing allowance of \$24,000 per annum for all employees. Advice from United Voice that employees refuse to cease the ongoing unapproved overtime practice is also having a significant impact on negotiation progress.

Bargaining environment

While I have reiterated certain factors impacting on current negotiations to United Voice on numerous occasions, it is important that employees clearly understand the following:

- I am required to negotiate enterprise agreements within the parameters of the Northern Territory Government's Wages Policy, which states that agreement outcomes will have a total overall cost of up to 3% per annum, dependent on efficiency measures achieved;
- This means that any outcome exceeding 3% must be funded through bankable, productivity off-sets, such as workplace reforms that achieve real, quantifiable cost savings;
- The General NTPS and Power and Water Corporation have settled, and in-principle agreement has been achieved with Medical Officers, on the basis of 3% per annum increases; and Government has no intention of agreeing to outcomes in excess of this for other agreements;
- Increases in salary will apply from the date agreement is reached on all matters;
- Government's position is consistent with outcomes being experienced in other jurisdictions, reflecting tight budgetary constraints both locally and nationally;

In summary, Government simply cannot afford to pay enterprise agreement outcomes in excess of 3% per annum. Further, as the Wages Policy specifies no-back pay, unfortunately fire-fighters are losing pay, and will continue to do so, for each day that negotiations continue.

Current Situation

The Australian Electoral Commission yesterday advised of the outcome of the protected action ballot outcome. Only fifty-six percent (56%) of employees eligible to participate in the ballot did so, but the majority of those who participated approved the taking of action as specified in the ballot paper.

While I acknowledge the right of United Voice members to now take protected industrial action to advance its claims, such action will not alter Government's policy.

At a bargaining meeting held today:

- my representative reiterated the need for United Voice to provide genuine savings and offsets to cover the additional costs of its claims and as a way of achieving a higher pay increase advised I was willing to explore the feasibility of rolling up leisure leave into salary;
- it was agreed that bargaining meetings will be scaled back to one meeting per month, with the flexibility to schedule additional meetings on an as needs basis if there are any issues that either party wishes to bring to the table between scheduled meetings; and
- it was agreed that the working party that has been established to discuss bargaining claims relating to recreation leave roster arrangements will continue to meet to discuss options for addressing these claims and associated matters (however, I note that any outcomes arising from those meetings form part of overall negotiations and cannot be implemented until in principle agreement is reached on all outstanding matters).

I believe that my [revised offer \(Information Sheet 2/2013\)](#) was fair and reasonable in all of the circumstances and look forward to a realistic approach to ongoing negotiations, so progress can be made and a pay increase can be passed onto employees without protracted delays.



KEN SIMPSON
Commissioner for Public Employment

24 January 2014