

## RFS award update

As members will be aware, the PSA and the Rural Fire Service (RFS) have been discussing the Award covering employees for a considerable time. This bulletin is to give you an update and will be followed by others over the coming weeks.

The key aims from the PSA and Delegates has been a recognition of hours worked and the difference between week day and weekend work.

The PSA bargaining team is composed of experienced Delegates Kam Baker, Ivan Perkins and Departmental Committee Chair Jim Killen, as well as PSA Industrial Officer Nick Player. We have been further assisted, particularly in the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) by Ben Trainor from the PSA's Legal Services.

The aim has always been to establish variations to the Award, or to create a new Award, by consent. That is where the parties take the matter to the IRC on an agreed basis seeking that it is then ratified by the IRC. Where the parties don't reach a consent position the matter goes through the more contentious arbitration process with the IRC.

### Why is it taking so long?

In order for the IRC to vary or create a new award, the NSW Government's Public Sector Wages Policy requires that it is 'cost-neutral'. Cost-neutral simply means the new or varied award is equal or less than the previous award in terms of employee-related costs.

In late 2019, the matter had progressed to the point where key principles were costed. Those costings revealed that the new Award would not be cost neutral, due to significant increases in staff allowances. The RFS sought the PSA's view as to whether we would agree to forego the proposed 2.5 per cent pay rise for RFS employees which would result in RFS employees being out of line with the rest of the public sector, in order to offset the increased staff allowances. The PSA could not agree with this.

The RFS then put back a less costly proposal which it advised would meet the key aims listed above. After several meetings to discuss and fine-tune this proposal we reached the point where it could be presented to the Wages Policy Taskforce (WPT). It should be noted that the WPT provides parameters to the employer for discussion (on the basis of the resulting Award being cost neutral in line with current Public Sector Wages Policy). The RFS engaged in discussions with the PSA up to now without having obtained these parameters, which is against usual practice.

Now, after some further delays, we are advised it has gone to the WPT and we await its response after 21 October. We have sought to have further meetings with RFS in the meantime to see what drafting of clauses can be achieved but the RFS declined, advising it could not do so until it heard back from WPT. We took this to the IRC and it has been agreed that the parties are to see if we could establish non-contentious clauses that could be worked on.

### Key points of the Award discussions

- Establishing a flexible working hour system enabling accrued hours to be taken as flex days
- A higher accrual rate for directed weekend work to recognise the difference between week days and weekends



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- A fair hourly retainer for duty officers
- A fair hourly rate for incidents (incident Allowance)
- Clarity in regard to Incident Conditions - further negotiation in relation to the structure of Incident Conditions and when they apply, are yet to be undertaken and agreed to between the parties
- The ACA – its future ability to equitably and consistently be applied across the organisation have been a particular point of discussion. This has brought into focus the equity and fairness of a revised system based on the principles of the Crown Award that will recompense staff for activities undertaken.

Members should understand that before going to the IRC with a consent position and a draft Award, the PSA will ultimately go back to members for consultation and a vote. As such, any vote on your pay and conditions is open to PSA members only. We welcome those who are not currently members to join at [www.psa.asn.au/join](http://www.psa.asn.au/join)

