

Rural Fire Service Award update and Q+A sessions

The PSA and your delegates will be holding a Teams meeting for all Rural Fire Service (RFS) PSA members on 27 April, from 12:30pm-2:30pm, to allow members to ask their union and delegates about the current award negotiations.

If you have specific issues you would like raised, please email Glenn Duncan at gduncan@psa.asn.au. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions on the 27th.

If you have colleagues who are not members of the PSA, please forward this email to them and encourage them to join at www.psa.asn.au/join. Our ability to maintain a strong bargaining position is only possible with a strong membership.

Please join the meeting at bit.ly/3sHI5jY.

Yesterday's eForum presented by RFS management

There has been a long history with the attempt to vary the *RFS Award* to something fairer than what has been in existence for some time.

The PSA, along with delegates Jim Killen, Kam Baker and Ivan Perkins, have been in discussions with RFS trying to develop principles that achieve this aim. We are significantly restricted by the current Government's wages policy which allows for no increase to employee related costs.

Note that whilst a principles document exists, management and the PSA have noted that there are some points of contention, such as overtime with bandwidth hours.

The intent has always been to reach a varied Award by consent/agreement. Members should be fully aware that a part of this process for the PSA is to put a final draft of the Award to our members for vote.

We have spoken with other Departmental Committee delegates this week who have raised further considerations, including in relation to the ACA and the ASP. The current process is to allow you to do so as well. We want to hear your views.

We don't doubt for a moment that there will be diverse views and many questions. We further recognise there will always be valuable thoughts, ideas and considerations from the members.

What we seek from you is that make your views known to your delegates, to the PSA and to management.

Be aware that members are entitled to meet and discuss these matters with delegates. The parties to the Award are the union and the employer. The delegates are representatives of the union and are recognised under the *Industrial Relations Act*.



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In contacting the PSA please refer to **Call Number 152824** regardless of whether you contact by phone on 1300 772 679 or email at membersupport@psa.asn.au.

Flexible working hours

We understand that one of the new aspects of this Award is the *Flexible Working Hours Agreement*. This will be new to many people. This system allows for flexibility of the actual hours you work in a day as well as the amount of hours across a week. It allows for the accrual of hours, enabling the taking of 26 flex days per year. Additionally, there is the ability to bank up to another 35 hours (although the banked hours need to be used up by the end of each financial year). Further information surrounding flexible working hours and associated issues will be distributed by the PSA in a separate bulletin.

Survey responses

Thank you all for your replies to the PSA's survey relating to the negotiations for the *RFS Award*. We received a high number of responses, as we would expect on such an important matter. Further to that there was absolute clarity in terms of the membership's view on each of the questions that were put. We were able to advise the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) of the strong views held by our members.

Note below the scenarios put in the survey and the percentage responses:

Scenario 1: On or around 22 March 2021, the Wages Policy Taskforce (WPT) approves bargaining parameters which are consistent with the Award negotiated thus far allowing the PSA and RFS to commence work on the remaining steps to finalise a consent Award.

- **More than 86 per cent supported continuing to seek a consent award.**

Scenario 2: The WPT fails to provide a response on or around 22 March 2021. The RFS and PSA will have to wait for the WPT to determine the application for bargaining parameters before work on the remaining steps can commence.

- **More than 94 per cent supported arbitrating the Award in this case.**

Scenario 3: On or around 22 March 2021, the WPT declines bargaining parameters (note: this will require the PSA and RFS to renegotiate all or aspects of the Award).

- **More than 96 per cent supported arbitrating the Award in this case.**

Scenario 4: On or around 22 March 2021, WPT approves bargaining parameters which are inconsistent with the Award negotiated thus far (note: this will require the PSA and RFS to renegotiate aspects of the Award – delaying a consent Award by several months).



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- **More than 94 per cent supported arbitrating the Award in this case.**

It appears clear that whilst the membership remains hopeful of a positive way forward on this in the short term, they have no further patience with delays. The PSA will proceed in line with this, in the case of further delays our members are clear they would prefer Arbitration.

IRC report back regarding RFS Award (25 March 2021)

The PSA was involved in a report back before the IRC on 25 March 2021. We advised the Commission the WPT had approved bargaining parameters in line with the Award, and as a result we could now proceed with the remaining steps to finalise the Award by consent.

The remaining steps, as previously advised, include staff consultation, drafting of the Award and a *Flexible Working Hours Agreement* and determining and affecting Information Communications Technology requirements. The PSA has been debating with the RFS over its estimated timeframes for these things to occur, with the RFS proposing an excessive timetable to finalise the Award. We advised the Commission that it was our strong view that the Award should be finalised by 30 June 2021, as we had been in negotiations for over three years.

The Commission did not issue a recommendation on the timeframe, as the timeframe was to be discussed at the Award review meeting on 30 March 2021.

Award Review Meeting (30 March 2021)

At the Award Review Meeting on 30 March 2021, the PSA advised the RFS of our proposed timetable which aimed toward a 30 June 2021 finalisation of the Award (subject to the availability of the Industrial Relations Commission). RFS advised that they were not in agreement and put forward undefined time frames for a communication strategy that would lead us into June with no defined target to finalisation of the entire process beyond that.

Further, RFS would not commit to providing the PSA with the opportunity to view in advance information that would go out from their Communications to staff. Nor would we be invited to comment on an intended survey in advance or view the results of that survey. To not allow this we would be disadvantaged in the next stages. The PSA did not agree to this.

It remains important that you provide your views and concerns to management, particularly where you have solutions, but it remains essential that you advise the PSA and delegates, too.



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PSA Response to RFS (31 March 2021)

PSA industrial staff involved met with the delegates to discuss the matters above. We made contact with the RFS and advised it that if it does not commit to the timetable provided or provide a satisfactory alternative with an end date, we would contact the IRC to urgently relist the matter.

The RFS responded to the PSA with an alternate timeframe which remained ill-defined and still did not give a clear end date. From the information provided it appeared to the PSA that it would be unlikely that the matter would be finalised prior to November.

We have been having discussions with Departmental Delegates and remain of the view this matter should be dealt with in a timelier manner than that proposed by management. We will continue to press this.

Who votes on the Award?

A reminder that for an Award to go forward by consent, prior to it going before the IRC, the PSA puts it to our members for a vote. We will give you notice of that stage but it is important to take note that the only people who vote are PSA members.

The PSA listens to its members. Non-members have a simple method of obtaining a vote. Join the union at www.psa.asn.au.

Your Delegates

- Jim Killen jim.killen@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Ivan Perkins ivan.perkins@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Kam Baker kam.baker@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Bradley Stewart bradley.stewart@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Daniel Ainsworth daniel.ainsworth@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Bruce Hansen bruce.hansen@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Fiona Campbell fiona.campbell@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Jillian Butler jillian.butler@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Lindsey Flynn lindsey.flynn@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Marty Webster martin.webster@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Lee Cook lee.cook@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Ben Plummer ben.plummer@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Your PSA staff

- **Nick Player** Industrial Officer nplayer@psa.asn.au
- **Glenn Duncan** Organiser gduncan@psa.asn.au

