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# **Secretary's Report 2020**

**SUE RILEY  
Secretary**

**Communication  
Workers Union  
Telecommunication  
And Services Branch  
Victoria**

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# SECRETARY'S ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS 2020

**Susan Riley**  
Secretary,  
CWU (T&S) Victoria



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## BRANCH SECRETARY'S ANNUAL REPORT 2020

2019/20 has seen the certification of Enterprise Agreements for Telstra, ESTA and Optus. The latter part of this year will see negotiations for a new agreement for ACMA. Australia Post is in a very interesting position, where the employer and the Divisional Office along with the 4 of the 7 branches agreed to defer bargaining for 12 months, however the Bargaining Agents have not consented to this (see further report).

At the time of writing, the Victorian membership is significantly impacted by the spread of Coronavirus19. Fortunately, to date, we are unaware of any positive cases reported amongst our members. Most members are working from home, except the emergency services operations for police fire and ambulance call-taker/dispatch and 000 at Telstra. The CWU office relocated to working from home on 24<sup>th</sup> March in anticipation of a stage 4 lockdown. Unfortunately as each day and week unfolds there are more spikes in Victoria which will likely result in tighter restrictions and further lockdown.

## BRANCH PERSONNEL

We said a quiet farewell to our long serving Accounts/Membership and Bookkeeper, Sharon Benson, who retired on 10<sup>th</sup> July. I take this opportunity to formally thank Sharon for her 40 plus years of dedication and loyalty to the branch. I am very grateful for her skills and knowledge as she has always been available to assist, which has been very much appreciated. We will all miss Sharon's cheery nature and we wish her a long and happy retirement.

Unfortunately we farewelled Maureen Parker who passed away last September. Maureen contributed to our branch in many ways. She was a member who served on our Branch Committee of Management for many years, and she was also elected to Divisional Executive, Divisional Conference and National Executive delegate positions. Maureen also often volunteered her time to assist the branch in recovering debts and spent many hours over the years calling unfinancial members. We miss her very much.

We warmly welcome our new Bookkeeper, Theresa Bradley, to the CWU Victorian T&S Branch and hope she has a bright future ahead with us.

Since the Union elections last year - which were uncontested - we also farewelled long term member of Branch Committee of Management Dave Smithwick, who resigned his position as he now works for the ACTU as a trainer. The two positions were declared vacant on the Branch Committee and we received two nominations; John Ellery and Fiona Crouch. Fiona

also filled the vacancies for Divisional Executive, Divisional Conference and will automatically fill the National Executive delegate position. We welcome both Fiona and John to these positions.

## **RECRUITMENT**

Last year I reported on the success of our recruitment officer, Jonathon Wright. He was engaged on a quarterly basis, for 12 months from Feb 2019 – Feb 2020, as approved by the National Council. The recruiter appointment was funded from our Investment account. I suppose the future for him at CWU may have been tenuous, given these circumstances. He resigned in January this year and has moved interstate and is still in the union movement. Our plan was always to re-hire a recruiter to assist growth in our membership, then COVID hit us, shortly after he left. Fortunately, Telstra have committed to the unions to put a freeze on redundancies.

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Our financial position reflects the expected situation. The audit findings accurately state that the CWU Divisional Council initiated legal proceedings to recover \$190k paid by them to an employee of the branch. The judgement handed down by the Federal Court on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020 was that the case be dismissed on the basis that the period stated in which repayment was to be enforced had lapsed. For this financial year, the amount of \$190k is now reflected as a liability in Other Payables and detailed in note 7B. Our Assets in the investment account were impacted by the deduction of money used to fund the recruitment officer (approved last financial year), decreased from \$617.6k in 2019 to \$521k in 2020 (refer note 6c). It has also taken a hit with a downturn movement and shown as a comprehensive financial loss of \$43,356. It may take some time to recover from this downward movement in the IFS fund. The other item of note is the legal expenses of \$26.9k. Considering all of this, if these items were discounted the loss of \$259k would be an actual profit of \$1k. It is also of note in the Financial Statements (1.24 Going Concern,) that the branch is a Going Concern, which assumes continuity of normal business activities and the realisation and the settlement of liabilities in the normal course of business.

## **ESTA**

The Operational Enterprise Agreement was certified in April 2020. We achieved various improvements, such as a brand new classification structure that is fairer for all. The previous basic 4 levels have now been replaced with a base salary, plus increments paid per skill set. We also managed to get a 20 years of service payment, yearly pay increases of 2.5% and a sign-on of \$1000. One of the outstanding issues has been under-resourcing, especially in Police Call-taker/Dispatch. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services recognised this and has funded 20 new operators for Police (outside of public sector funding). In addition, we have a clause in the Agreement which establishes a Staffing Review Committee with representatives from all the Unions, Industrial Relation Victoria (IRV), Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) and ESTA. It will be facilitated by an independent person, with the aim of improving resources, by reviewing rosters, recruitment, training, and attrition rates -with ESTA providing relevant data and information.

Operational members have continued to present to work throughout this difficult era of COVID19. To date, there have been no confirmed cases and ESTA has managed social distancing at each site quite well given the circumstances.

The Admin/Support office employees are largely working from home and only access on-site as necessary. It has been difficult for some with adjustments and some sacrifices to be made. Many have to home-school children and work at the same time which has been problematic and at times frustrating. One positive from COVID is that it does afford more availability for families spending time together and connecting.

## **TELSTRA**

The certification of the Enterprise Agreement was delayed as a result of Telstra having to provide a series of undertakings to the Fair Work Commission. The undertakings related to the Better Off Overall Test (BOOT) and Job Family employees with rates of pay attracting a margin of less than 10% above the award rate. This was because of the different treatment or removal of a range of entitlements in the Agreement compared to the Award.

Other than a pay rise of 1.5% and 1.8%, there were no real gains or improvements. The branch representative on the bargaining team (John Ellery) was outvoted by the rest of the default bargaining team. The Agreement now allows for enforced direction for employees to take Long Service Leave (9 days) upon accrual of 90 days. There is also a transmission of business clause that sets up enablement for Telstra to avoid redundancy payments for employees who transfer between entities in the Telstra Group. The Agreement took effect on 19/6/2020 and expires on 30/9/21. Hopefully the next bargaining round will see better efforts into actually improving the current conditions, for example the ability to transfer from Job Family to Workstream.

Other issues in 19/20 include the strategy adopted by Telstra to attempt to notify their employees of a 'shutdown' – at times that it suits them. Telstra have tried to 'shutdown' over Easter, Christmas/New Year and even Melbourne Cup Eve. This is largely to manage their own leave liabilities and not to benefit their employees. We know employees want to use their annual leave entitlements at a time which suits them – not Telstra. We anticipate this to escalate in some litigious manner at some stage.

During the very early days of COVID19, Telstra did commit to placing a freeze on further redundancies and furthermore to employing extra staff. The global pandemic meant that the off-shored call centres in The Philippines and India were impacted and closures occurred. We hope that Telstra learn from this and continue to employ within Australia, rather than exploit cheap outsourced labour.

## **AUSTRALIA POST**

Australia Post Enterprise Agreement is due to expire in August 2020. It seems AP have used COVID19 to avoid bargaining for a new Agreement, therefore avoiding pay increases to the very employees whose workload has dramatically increased. The CWU divisional office and 4 out of 7 branches agreed to this tactic of delaying negotiating for a year via a Memorandum of Understanding with AP. The Victorian T&S and P&T branches along with NSW T&S branch opposed it. AP has suggested there would be no involuntary redundancies during the year

unless it was COVID related. Meanwhile the Bargaining Agents involved have expressed their view that they prefer to commence negotiating – as required in the Fair Work Act.

## **THANK YOU**

I would like to formally thank our former and current Branch Committee of Management members for their ongoing support and for volunteering their time to assist in the running of the branch. I extend that appreciation to the BCOM Executive - President Kelvin Welbourn, Vice President Amy Stubberfield, and Assistant Secretary Scott Thomson - for their support, commitment and expertise. I particularly want to note my grateful appreciation to our Branch Office Accounts/Bookkeeper, Sharon Benson who retired recently. Her tireless dedication and commitment to the branch has been invaluable and we will miss her greatly. Thank you to our Industrial Officer John Ellery who has represented matters across our various membership. Our branch consists of 3 personnel now and we continue to function well whilst serving our membership with much pride and persistence.

I specifically want to thank all delegates who often volunteer hours of their personal time to achieve better outcomes for all members. I'm indebted to you for your endless campaigning to achieve positive results and constant endorsement of the CWU.

Finally, I thank all our rank and file members who join to make a collective that I'm very proud to be a part of.

Yours in Unity,

SUE RILEY  
Secretary  
CWU (T&S) Vic