



AFSU REPS NEWS

THE AGENDA



From the National Secretary's office

Debt stress media blitz

Judging by the comments passed on by members, a number of people have noticed the FSU commenting on the issue of debt stress on radio, television and in print.

The prime reason for entering the debate is to ensure the wider community develops some understanding of the pressure finance sector workers are under.

Late last year FSU conducted research with members of the public. Most had some awareness that finance sector workers have KPI's or sales targets to meet, and that was the reason they were continually offered products, usually debt creating products such as loans or credit cards.

However, they were quite shocked to learn of the practice of linking pay outcomes to the sale of these products, and that in effect staff needed to push the sale to avoid a pay freeze, or in the worst cases, adverse pay outcomes or loss of employment.

FSU members in all areas of the sector tell us that target-related stress is an everyday reality for them.

Members report a feeling of powerlessness when confronted with ever-increasing targets and higher performance hurdles to get over.

At times like that, your union membership is invaluable.

FSU assists members in similar situations every day. From individual advocacy at the workplace to ensure fair and consultative target setting arrangements, to negotiating the inclusion of mutually agreed target setting in enterprise agreements.

FSU will continue to campaign publicly on this issue which affects the vast majority of members.

If you require assistance with your particular circumstances, please contact the Member Rights Centre on 1300 366 378. The Member Rights Centre operates from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday (EST).

LEC elections coming

The Local Enterprise Council is a state forum for members elected to represent the views of members at their particular enterprise. It's an opportunity to come together with other finance sector colleagues, to discuss issues and give guidance to the union leadership.

As the terms of the first LECs come to an end it is an opportune time to congratulate and convey my thanks to the workplace leaders who have played an essential part in the democratic process of our union. These members are eligible to renominate if they wish.

The Australian Electoral Commission will conduct a ballot in the coming months, and in early April there will be a call for nominations.

I encourage all members to consider stepping up to the challenge of serving on the LEC in their state, and look forward to working with the newly elected LEC members in their quest to continue to build the union in workplaces around the country.



Leon Carter, FSU National Secretary with SA/NT LEC members. Back row L-R, Debbie Black (LEC Secretary), Anne O'Connell (WBC), Jan Ruwoldt (Insurance). Front row L-R, Karen Aldridge (CBA), Yvonne Songer (BSA), Elli Doolan (NAB).

Reps hold strong and win twice in Tasmanian Call Centre case

"Some of my colleagues say joining the union is like putting a target on your back. I tell them it's the opposite. Joining the union is like putting on a bullet-proof vest. You're more protected in the union than you are out of it."

Tanya Murray, FSU Workplace Rep, WBC Call Centre Launceston

Most people look forward to their Easter break. The Christmas/New Year break is a distant memory and it's an opportunity to spend time with family and friends.

Over the years, the Westpac Tasmanian Call Centres in Launceston, Myrtle and Huon had adopted a "business as usual" approach to the Easter period, often directing staff to work on Easter Saturday.

It's something that FSU members were unhappy about, and raised with their workplace reps each time Easter rolled around.

In September 2006, a new Memorandum of Understanding had been reached between FSU and Westpac. The Memorandum specifically states that staff could not be directed to work on any national public holidays.

This gave the local reps the opportunity to develop a campaign around the issue, particularly when staff were again directed to work on Easter Saturday in 2007.

FSU Reps Tanya Murray and Leah Smith examined the roster, and made note of which colleagues had worked during Easter 2007. They approached their colleagues in person or by email, to ask if they were interested in pursuing their rights. Generally the response was positive.

The reps then contacted the union and FSU Organiser Jo Taylor arranged a workplace visit to meet staff, and to establish if further underpayments existed.

Westpac agreed to notify staff of the visit, but members were advised to seek the permission of their team leader before meeting the union.

Many were fearful of doing so, and those that did want to meet the union organiser had trouble finding her, as she was designated to an out of the way room and no signage was posted. 5 people met with the union on that day.

FSU took a Right of Entry case to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC), asserting the union had not been provided with sufficient access to investigate suspected breaches. The reps gave evidence at the hearing.

At the first AIRC conciliation, Westpac conceded that it had breached the Award, and that 140 staff received back pay for working during Easter 2007.

In an AIRC hearing in December 2007, Westpac gave evidence that there were other Award breaches relating to other years. Westpac has since written to more staff acknowledging the underpayments, but the full extent of the underpayments is yet to be determined.

To assist the process of investigating the underpayments, the AIRC ordered that any staff who wished to meet individually with the union could do so for 15 minutes, and Westpac were required to comply with the order. Importantly, the AIRC took the unprecedented step of directly notifying staff of their right to meet with the Union.

Because the reps had stepped up and made a stand, many more staff were no longer fearful. Over 60 people met with the union the next time officers visited.

FSU have undertaken interviews and will be seeking further evidence to examine to determine how many staff had been paid incorrectly.

In a huge win for members at the call centre, no one has been directed to work over Easter in 2008. Tanya and Leah and their colleagues have added to their ranks by recruiting one new rep and many new members.



Tanya Murray (left) and Leah Smith

Tanya Murray's story:

"We felt vulnerable and worried about how we'd be treated in the workplace as a result of giving evidence. In fact our management couldn't do enough for the reps. We felt really empowered by what we did, and really proud to help our colleagues."

"The money we're talking about is small, but it's about enforcing your rights. And in fact, for us, the money isn't as important as the principle. This year, we'll all be enjoying time with our families over Easter instead of working."

Leah Smith's story:

"Sitting in a room facing questions at the AIRC hearing from a top Sydney barrister, with the Westpac management team sitting along the back wall, was a bit nerve-wracking. But there's been no backlash at all. Westpac have been very good to us and very fair. The National Call Centre manager actually congratulated us on having the courage of our convictions."

"My advice to other reps is don't be scared to take issues up or take them further if you don't get anywhere initially. We're protected by law and protected by the union."

Reps in Profile



Pauline Olson, IFS

I like providing members with clarification around issues and providing support in whatever way is needed.

I want my colleagues to know what their rights are and our employer to know there's someone in the workplace that is looking out for staff.

I've learned how the negotiation table works, that it's important for each side to operate as a team, and be organised. Our negotiating team meets in advance of meetings with the employer, so we all understand what we want to achieve, and what our respective roles are.

The stakes are high because it's going to affect so many people. My colleagues often encourage us and comment that they appreciate what we are doing.

This bargaining round has strengthened our IFS rep team as well as bringing the reps from ME and IFS together; we bounce things off one another and support one another. Our combined knowledge and understanding of the businesses and the people who work in them is a definite plus.

I would not want to go into a negotiation with my employer without the union.

To reps preparing to bargain in their workplace my advice is:

- sort yourself out administratively (i.e. email contact lists, dedicated folders on the system with limited access to store documents and folders for hard copies)
- caucus with your bargaining team before and after meeting with the employer
- put a communication plan in place. Members expect regular bargaining updates from the union, and they appreciate the requests for feedback
- know your EBA, and have an understanding of how it relates to policies, especially how they work or don't work in practice
- FSU brings technical knowledge to the table and reps bring practical knowledge of the workplace. The end result impacts on people as well as business for a long time afterwards.



Peter Waclawik, Members Equity

I stepped up as a result of an issue at work that affected a number of us. Colleagues were coming to me for advice and assistance, so it made sense to become a rep.

It's amazing how much it helps for someone to have a sounding board, and I get a real sense of achievement out of helping others.

I want to boost the level of participation in our workplace.

I work in IT, where people tend to earn good money, and there's a perception there is no union coverage. There are a number of inequities in the IT field, such as long hours and work pressure, and these are the sort of things we can resolve collectively.

I tell colleagues that as a group we are stronger, and that the rights and conditions we have are vulnerable. We should not take them for granted and we need to use or collective strength to ward off any attempts by employers to whittle them away.

We need to focus, not only on areas where we see inequities, but equally on maintaining hard-won conditions.

This will only happen if we have a strong membership base and stand together to assert our rights.



Jamie Harrold, WA LEC member, BankWest Call Centre

I became an LEC member at the time our enterprise agreement was being finalised, so it was a really exciting time.

I had been a workplace rep for 6 months and wanted to get more directly involved in issues and making recommendations to the union leadership.

The next issue for us at BankWest is the pay equity audit FSU negotiated in our agreement. I'll be heavily involved in that.

To reps considering nominating for their LEC I say go for it! There's no better opportunity to have a direct impact. I am empowered and encouraged by serving on my LEC, and I can better represent the people I care about; my workmates.

New online resources for reps

Looking for new ways to increase your colleagues' engagement with FSU?

If you haven't checked the FSU website lately, it's time to log back on to **www.fsunion.org.au**. As well as a complete overhaul of the design and functionality, the new website provides members with more ways to have a say.

Click on the News and Views section and you will find online forums and surveys for members.

The online forums provide a place for members to have their say on an issue publicly, and at present we're receiving posts on offshoring, targets and superannuation.

The surveys provide valuable information to feed into union campaigns, negotiations and lobbying. FSU is currently surveying members in insurance, Westpac Home Finance Managers and a stress test for Call Centre workers.

E-Newsletter

Surprised to know that less than half of FSU members have provided the union with an email address? In addition to the printed magazines, newsletters and updates provided to members and reps each year, FSU publishes a fortnightly e-newsletter, **FSU Online**.

Make sure you don't miss any important information by providing your email address and those of your colleagues. Simply send an email to fsuinfo@fsunion.org.au and ask for your details to be updated.

National FSU Reps Training Dates

Visit <http://www.fsunion.org.au/Workplace-Representatives/Reps-Courses-2008.aspx> for more information and registration forms

VIC/TAS

Reps interested in the courses should either speak to their organiser or Lyndon Dalton directly on 9261 5422.

Reps Course Dates - Introductory

Mon 14th & Tue 15th April 2008
Wed 14th & Thu 15th May 2008

Reps Course Dates - Advanced

Tue 17th & Wed 18th June 2008
Wed 24th & Thu 25th September 2008
Wed 26th & Thu November 2008

NSW/ACT

The course runs for 2 days. It aims to develop skills needed for Reps to deal effectively with resolving members' concerns at the workplace level.

Available Course Dates for 2008

Tue 18th & Wed 19th March
Wed 9th & Thu 10th April
Tue 13th & Wed 14th May
Wed 18th & Thu 19th June

QLD

FSU Queensland will be conducting two-day Reps Training Courses in Brisbane during 2008:

Thu 6th & Fri 7th March
Thu 22nd & Fri 23rd May

SA/NT

Intro Reps

Tue 8th & Wed 9th April
Wed 11th & Thu 12th June

WA

Course 2

D1 - Tue 1st April
D2 - Wed 2nd April
D3 - Tue 22nd April

Course 3

D1 - Tue 20th May
D2 - Wed 21st May
D3 - Tue 17th June

2008 Biennial FSU QLD Reps Conference

When: Wednesday, 4 June 2008

Where: Customs House, Brisbane

Come And Help Create Your Union Of The Future

Places are limited for this one-day Reps Conference, so faxback your expression of interest as soon as possible. The Conference will run from approximately 8.30 am to 5.00 pm with lunch, morning and afternoon tea provided. Drinks and finger food will be provided following the Conference.

FSU will apply for paid industrial leave for Reps to attend the Conference. We will contact you to discuss arrangements for attending the Conference before we apply for this leave.

Register Today!

To register your attendance please complete the online form at <http://www.fsunion.org.au/FSU-in-your-Region/State-Offices/QLD/2008-Biennial-FSU-State-Reps.aspx>

Next issue of The Agenda due at the end of June 2008

Do you have a story to tell? Could other reps learn from the activities reps have undertaken in your workplace? Contact Leanne in Communications to be featured in the next edition of The Agenda.

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