



DEFENCE UNIONS IN PHYSICAL SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

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(A LITTLE) MORE REVEALED IN DECA NEGOTIATIONS

The [last](#) of these bulletins addressed Defence's intended approach to the early stages of renegotiating the Defence Enterprise Collective Agreement (DECA). In short, the Department would reveal its bargaining agenda progressively, dealing with each Part of the DECA one by one (and not in order).

Day 1 of the negotiations had addressed Part A of DECA.

Days 2 and 3 were held in Canberra on Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th October. They addressed Parts E and I and Annex H.

Unions Respond

At this week's meeting, the unions, including the CPSU:

- noted the interactions between the different Parts of DECA, e.g. between the provisions on consultation at its Section A4 and the change management processes in its Part C (particularly at Section C2);
- stated that they were not prepared to respond to Defence's proposed drafts of various Parts with their own drafting proposals until **all** Parts had been addressed by Defence;
- requested Defence to have disclosed its proposals for most (if not all) of the remaining Parts by the end of the third meeting, which is due to be held in Canberra on 30th and 31st October; and, to this end
- requested a copy of Defence's intended forward program for negotiations.

Our two unions had understood from Defence that it (Defence) would try to accommodate the request at the third of the arrow points above, although it may not be ready to put its position on pay, pending approval by the Australian Public Service Commission. We were apparently mistaken.

Defence emailed its forward program to the various bargaining representatives last night. It indicated that:

- certain Parts and Annexes would not be introduced to the negotiations until the fourth meeting, scheduled to be held on 18th and 19th November; these Parts include Parts F and C, which deal with hours of work, leave and the management of organisational change; and
- the pay offer would not be made until the fifth meeting, scheduled for 3rd and 4th December.

Notwithstanding their position on specific drafting, this week the unions:

- gave some initial reactions to the proposals put by Defence on Parts E and I and Annex H;
- discussed in general terms a number of concerns they hold in respect of Defence's proposals for Part A.

They intend to return to these matters in greater detail at future meetings, but they first want a sense of Defence's position on pay and key entitlements like hours of work and the various types of leave - not to mention the remediation of the physical science and engineering stream.

One or Two Veils Fewer

Now that three days of negotiations have been concluded, some of the directions have become more evident.

Defence clearly intends to significantly reduce the length of DECA, relying more heavily in future on supporting documentation like the Defence Workplace Relations Manual and legislation (like the Work Health and Safety Act 2011), without referring to that legislation within the agreement. One example from this week is the proposal to reduce Part E of DECA from its current approximately five pages, 37 paragraphs and one principle to approximately half a page, six paragraphs and one principle. For their part, the unions believe that some of the content proposed to be deleted should not be, although they are not opposed to all of Defence's "streamlining". They believe that some of what Defence characterises as processes are in fact entitlements.

Inflexibilities have been built into the "negotiations" by some of the specifications of the Abbott Government's bargaining policy. Examples include the proposed replacement of the current DECA's dispute resolution and consultation provisions, which were tailored to meet Defence's circumstances, with template provisions. Defence appears to have little, if any, capacity to negotiate changes to these templates.

It is also of note that yesterday Defence advised that, although it was proposing to retain paragraph 12.2 of the current DECA, "questions had been raised" about the need for such retention. It solicited the unions' response, which was given forcefully - the unions will not support a proposed new agreement without that paragraph retained.

Our two unions will convene a national telephone hook-up of their delegates shortly before the next two days of negotiations.

You are encouraged to remain in contact with your local delegate.

