



MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 26 August, 2024

CEPU must suspend industrial action and protect Tasmanians

TasNetworks has sought urgent intervention from the Fair Work Commission to make the Communications, Electrical & Plumbing Union (CEPU) honour its word and suspend industrial action in response to TasNetworks' severe weather event declaration.

The CEPU made a written commitment on 14 August that TasNetworks CEO, Seán Mc Goldrick, could call a declared incident in the event of emergency situations such as storms. In these circumstances, the CEPU committed that industrial action would be paused. Dr McGoldrick declared an incident late yesterday, with the Bureau of Meteorology forecasting severe winds and heavy rainfall starting soon, and lasting much of the week.

That declaration directs TasNetworks employees to return to normal rostered and emergency duties for the period of the event. Industrial action can then resume once the event's passed and any impacts have been resolved.

Despite the commitment made by the CEPU on 14 August, late yesterday the union instructed members by SMS to defy the event declaration and continue disruptive industrial action in spite of any imminent storm damage.

Dr Mc Goldrick said the matter's now before the Fair Work Commission with a hearing scheduled for 5pm today, but the onus is fully on the union to do the right thing by Tasmanians anyway.

"With all hands back on deck, we'd be able get on with doing what our people do so well – protecting and reconnecting Tasmanians without power," Dr Mc Goldrick said.

"Despite our current differences, we are all Tasmanians. Our fellow Tasmanians need TasNetworks and relevant unions united in serving and supporting them at this moment of severe imminent weather. If the union breaks its earlier commitment, and defies our declaration, it's condemning and abandoning potentially thousands of Tasmanians to the misery of long outages.

"Common decency dictates that you keep your word. And common decency and compassion dictates that you don't leave innocent Tasmanians at the mercy of storm damage and resulting outages.

"We fully respect our people's right to take lawful industrial action, and they can resume that once this weather event's passed and resulting outages have been resolved.

"But I'm equally convinced that most of our people want to serve and support Tasmanians in times of need, and feel a great sense of pride and duty in doing so," he said.

To prioritise unplanned outages and help minimise the impact of union-led industrial action, TasNetworks has already suspended all planned work from at least Tuesday 20 August to Sunday 1 September. Planned work will remain suspended in response to any upcoming storm damage.

The current average base salary of TasNetworks employees covered by its Enterprise Agreement is over \$100,000. The business's standing offer would increase wages by seven percent in Year One of the three-year agreement (not including overtime or allowances).

"Adding a full seven per cent for a workforce already averaging more than \$100,000 a year is a very good deal that supports and rewards our people better than ever before," Dr Mc Goldrick said.

"Our average salaries already compare very well to other Tasmanian wages. We're 'middle of the pack' on interstate pay parity, and offering another seven per cent.

"We must keep Tasmanians' power prices under control – which is why the union's extreme wage demands of up to 35 per cent are unacceptable and out of the question. We hope to reach an agreement soon," he said.

TasNetworks has thanked all team members and contractors currently helping to minimise the impact of union-led industrial action. It's also thanked Tasmanians for their ongoing patience and support as the business stands its ground in protection of power prices.

TasNetworks' current Enterprise Agreement offer includes:

- A Year 1 wage increase of seven per cent, plus a one-off payment of \$2,000;
- Year 2 and 3 increases linked to CPI or 2.25% (whichever's higher), with no capped maximum (keeping pace with inflation);
- Paid parental leave of 15 weeks for both parents;
- Days off (no longer charged as annual leave) during Christmas to New Years Day shutdown;
- Many other improved provisions.

TasNetworks continues to meet with union representatives and individual bargaining representatives, with the next meeting scheduled for Tuesday 27 August.

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