Union again delay agreement – now demanding 23 Separate Agreements

It is disappointing that we must inform you that Union leadership has now made an unreasonable demand by saying that they will only agree to the negotiated package going to ballot if the proposed structure of the agreements is changed from two agreements (Diocesan Schools and RI schools) to 23 agreements (one for each Catholic school employing authority).

This is in spite of the fact that the entire EB7 negotiation process has been negotiated on a two agreement basis and that union (and employers) have been working painstakingly to prepare these two Agreements in a timely way. In addition, all SBU sub-committee work by employer and union representatives has been conducted on the basis of two Agreements.

The union’s own briefings also contradict their demand by clearly aligning employers into two groups: Diocesan schools and Religious Institute schools. In a further contradiction, during the August SBUs, the Union provided two documents referred to as draft Agreements, and pronounced that they would settle the negotiations: one for the Diocesan group of employers and the other for the Religious Institute schools.

There never has been, nor is there now any good reason for there to be 23 separate Agreements. Employees in Catholic schools have lost nothing and have nothing to lose by there being only two Agreements. This scenario of a limited number of Agreements has successfully delivered improvements to wages and working conditions for employees for at least ten years.

In addition, employers have a formal declaration from the Federal Minister for Workplace Relations and the formal authorisation of Fair Work Australia to bargain as a group of employers with a single interest - being Catholic education.

It is implausible that the union leadership will achieve anything constructive through this demand.

Risk to back pay before Christmas

Employers have time and time again attempted to have union leadership understand that back payments for enterprise bargaining wage increases cannot be made before Christmas if an in-principle agreement is not reached by the end of October.

The time needed to calculate and make back payment is now here.

Payment of wage increases and back payments will be made as soon as possible after the receipt of results from a ballot of employees where the majority of those who vote in each agreement approve the proposed Agreement.

It must be remembered that there is a legislative requirement that provides for employees to have access to a proposed Agreement for at least seven days before a ballot.

The position adopted by union leadership also means a deferral of access by employees to other benefits that will only be available once an agreement is made.

Employers want to deliver

Catholic employing authorities will continue working towards delivering wage increases and improvements to conditions of service for employees in Diocesan and Religious Institute schools through the structure of the two proposed EB Agreements.

Employers have now done all they can do to ensure the negotiated package goes to ballot.

It is now up to union leaders and union members to act to remove this current unreasonable obstruction and allow the two proposed Agreements to move quickly to a ballot of employees.