

Hi everyone,

As you are aware we have begun working with your bargaining agent, the MEAA and staff representatives on a new collective agreement.

We met for the first time last week to discuss a log of claims presented on your behalf. I wanted to clearly understand the issues most important to you and during this discussion we managed to narrow the items to those that appropriately belonged in this agreement process.

As it turned out there were some operational matters both parties agreed should be dealt with separately. I highlighted these in an email last Wednesday.

After presenting AAP's position at a second meeting tomorrow we will then have the best platform for reasonable negotiation.

You will be given some options and I ask that you carefully consider these in the context of the current state of our industry.

This is a very tough time for everyone.

In meeting the challenges we all face, AAP seeks to maintain a productive and progressive workplace that you can be proud of and will enjoy being a part of.

Firstly, AAP is seeking to modernise the existing agreement as it's a document that no longer reflects the requirements of the modern journalist or its employer. Many clauses don't acknowledge significant development in technology; changes to work practice; or life patterns.

NOT A BAD PLACE TO BE

People within our news operation and people who have left always refer to AAP as a family because of the way we treat our staff.

We can't afford the salaries of bigger news organisations but we do care for our people.

- Since September 2009 we've granted just on 500 days of special leave among five people because they were struggling with health and home. It's been well above entitlement and has come at a cost of more than \$180,000.
- Since December 2008 16 people have taken maternity leave. All but one has returned to work. At their request we have carefully eased them back in part-time roles and altered duties in consideration of their commitments.
- More than a third of our editorial staff (an average of 54 in the life of this agreement) receive upgradings every year - over and above the base salary increases. The average annual base salary of full-time editorial staff, excluding management and exempt staff is \$71,376 (just above Grade 5). In 2007 (the start of this agreement) the average annual salary was \$60,744 (inc leave loading). An 18% increase.
- Our commitment to staff training has been very well received: Since 2008, the equivalent of more than 360 editorial staff has attended internal and external courses of between four hours and five days. These have been for basic skills training, multi-media, media law, leadership and anti-discrimination. Former editor John Coomber has been appointed Training Editor.

Further, AAP provides the following benefits to all editorial staff:

- Confidential counselling service at company cost
- Annual flu shots
- Relocation leave
- Health checks
- On site seminars on private health insurance
- On site superannuation seminars
- Default superannuation fund offers insurance protection

- Complimentary fruit available to all staff
- All major bureaus provided with automatic coffee machines. Except Canberra who have turned theirs down
- Discount shopping card to all Rhodes staff
- Annual Newswire Awards
- Annual three-month professional exchange with Press Association, London
- Travel famils (free trips) offered to staff
- On site social events - eg barbecues at company cost
- Free car parking for staff on certain shifts
- Company gifts to staff who have given birth or their partner has given birth
- Subsidised jackets and work shirts

While it would be nice to do even more, the amount we do by any measure is well above what would be expected by an employer ... and certainly one of AAP's means.

THE AGREEMENT DISCUSSIONS

AAP has entered these enterprise discussions with an open mind and ready to listen. Last week it was great to get the detail of those matters at the front of your minds.

Equally, it was gratifying to receive the acknowledgement of our efforts during the past four years. And all at the meeting reflected on the fact that so many things we do for staff largely fly under the radar.

In opening last week's meeting I asked all bargaining representatives maintain perspective.

I urged employees take a close look at their surroundings; carefully consider the benefits and the environment we foster; but above all, consider the grim reality that besets our industry.

Last month our agency colleagues in New Zealand, the NZPA announced its closure after 132 years.

This month Fairfax revealed another major editorial restructure in order to save the business while newspapers in the UK and the US are shutting their doors.

AAP exists to assist the media and three quarters of our company's revenue comes from media customers.

Our news service is fast, accurate, reliable and respected but it must be cost effective - now more than ever as our customers buckle under the weight of old and expensive workflows and infrastructure.

Our margins are tight, to the point where even the smallest of fluctuations in costs and income are felt. We're cautious spenders because we have to be. That is our reality.

We'll keep you posted but in the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the agreement discussions.

Tony

Tony Gillies | Editor in Chief

Australian Associated Press

L6 3 Rider Boulevard Rhodes Waterside, Rhodes, NSW, 2138, Australia T +61293228500 | M

0414320487 | E tgillies@aap.com.au