New policy must deliver after pay cap scrap

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UnionsWA has commented on the release by the Cook Government of a new public sector pay policy which has abolished the cap on public sector wages in WA.

Since its launch in June 2021, the Public Sector Alliance, coordinated by UnionsWA, has called for the end to the wages cap and a return to genuine bargaining.

Owen Whittle, UnionsWA Secretary, said the latest wage policy is a welcome improvement on the past and a vital shift back to genuine negotiation within the state public sector.

“Removing an arbitrary pay cap and allowing unions to bargain on merit will deliver better outcomes over the long term for working people and the communities served,” he said.

“Since 2017 the State Wages Policy has led to a race to the bottom on wages and hampered the ability to deliver vital public services.

“Public sector unions and UnionsWA launched the Public Sector Alliance (PSA) in June 2021 to increase wages in the public sector and return to genuine bargaining.

“We are pleased that the state government has listened to our public sector workforce.”

Mr Whittle said the PSA was united, not only in securing this bargaining process, but also to ensure real wages growth to make up for declining real pay over many years.

“Public sector workers deserve real wage increases,” he said.

“We stay committed to pushing for seven per cent and five per cent pay rises over the next two years, an aim that unions

have strongly reconfirmed.

“At the end of the day what needs to be delivered are pay rises in the pockets of working people that factor in high costs of living.

“We have seen first-hand the impacts of divisive and stringent pay policy on the public sector workforce, including low morale, attraction and retention issues and stretched service delivery.”

Mr Whittle said this was the state government’s opportunity to catch up.

“The proposition that different agencies need to bargain in good faith with their workforce and union representatives is sound,” he said.

“Good faith bargaining is what goes on in every other workplace, so of course that can and should occur across the public sector.

“Bargaining will allow for consideration of a wider range of issues.

“While pay will always be central, other conditions - overall staffing levels to manage workloads better, infrastructure and other investments – are also important and vary from workplace to workplace.

“A properly paid firefighter stuck with old trucks and or inadequate safety equipment, or a properly paid teacher with huge classrooms packed full of students, cannot do their job properly and they do want to be able to negotiate better outcomes for the services we all rely on.

“The great failure of the earlier fixed low pay policy was that real wages went backwards for many – in the case of senior teachers, firefighters and child protection workers by over ten thousand dollars since 2017.”

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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