



RTBU

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THE NATIONAL
MEMBER
NEWSLETTER
— of the —
RAIL, TRAM &
BUS UNION

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Secret talks undermine rail

EXCLUSIVE

Harley Dennett

SECRET talks to allow cheap foreign-flagged ships access to Australia's interstate transport market could undermine the viability of the massive inland rail project and threaten thousands of regional jobs, unions have warned.

audience, would see foreign vessels more easily competing for domestic freight work without paying Australian wages or conditions. Similar coastal trading reforms were defeated by the Senate twice since 2015.

Labor has repeatedly called out the Transport Department for limiting opportunities for affected

newest paper was not made available to the rail freight sector either.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union is concerned rail freight along the 1700km "corridor of commerce" will turn into a white elephant, threatening incomes and livelihoods in regional Australia that depend on inland rail.

freight were functionally independent and the reforms would have "no meaningful impact" on rail.

"These reforms will decimate jobs, many of which are concentrated in regional Australia," RTBU national secretary Mark Diamond said. He called on Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack to

"Up to 10,000 direct and indirect jobs are at risk if foreign-flagged vessels with third world labour practices are allowed to undercut Australian conditions. This will be a sucker punch to Australian workers," he said.

The RTBU predicted regional Australia would see an increase to rail freight pricing due to the reduced rail volumes, noting freight

in order to recover its fixed operational costs. The deputy PM had a case to answer, the union claimed, having described the inland rail project as a 1700km "corridor of commerce" that would underpin regional economies.

"But now his own department could turn that project into a massive white elephant," Mr Diamond said.

**RTBU fights to save
10,000 regional
freight jobs
threatened by
foreign-flagged
ships**

Just a sec!

Through all the drama of 2020, our Union stood tall, and fought to protect the rights and health of workers and their communities across Australia.



RTBU members led the fight to see face masks made mandatory for passengers on public transport in Victoria, and forced politicians to start taking the advice of medical experts.

RTBU members led loud community campaigns against public transport privatisation in New South Wales and South Australia.

RTBU members put the restoration of Tier 3 grain lines back on the agenda in Western Australia, and successfully fought to see privatised parts of the passenger rail network brought back under government control.

RTBU members finally secured a new Enterprise Agreement for bus drivers in Tasmania, after an 18-month fight.

And RTBU members successfully stopped the Brisbane-based national industry health fund, RT Health, from being sold to a corporate raider.

This an impressive list of achievements, especially in a year when it has almost impossible to conduct traditional campaign events. It shows that our Union is a powerful campaigning organisation, especially when we engage with the

broader public and advocate for the common good.

In that spirit, we have launched two new national campaigns over the Christmas / New Year period.

The first campaign is seeking to secure better protections for workers who are vulnerable to the deadly impacts of COVID-19. This is an issue which was front-and-centre for our members in Victoria during the lockdown, and again during the recent outbreak in Sydney.

The second campaign is about preventing the Federal Government from moving long-haul intermodal freight off trains and onto foreign ships. The Coalition has already tried to do this once, but their efforts were blocked in the Senate. Now they're trying to do it again.

As a mid-size union, we truly punch above our weight division on the national stage. But we always do our best work when we are united and back each other up. I urge you to get involved in these campaigns, and to spread the word among your friends and family.

I wish all RTBU members a safe and enjoyable new year, and the very best for 2021.

In solidarity,
Mark Diamond
National Secretary

... our Union is a powerful campaigning organisation, especially when we engage with the broader public and advocate for the common good.

All stops

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**Let's stop the plan to take
containerised freight off trains
and onto foreign ships.**

Tell your local Federal MP to

**KEEP FREIGHT ON
AUSSIE TRAINS**

www.keepfreightonaussietrains.org.au



CAMPAIGN NEWS

Tell your local MP to keep freight on Aussie trains

A Federal Transport Department proposal to make it easier for foreign-flagged ships to compete for freight transport work could see intermodal services being undercut by exploited seafarers earning as little as \$7 an hour.

The proposal could have dire consequences for Intermodal rail freight across the country.

The RTBU is campaigning to Keep *Freight on Rail* by stopping the

proposal in its tracks before it gets to Parliament.

National Secretary Mark Diamond encouraged all members to get behind the campaign by sending an email to their local Federal MP.

“These reforms will hurt jobs, many of which are concentrated in regional Australia,” Mark said.

“The intermodal rail sector competes directly with coast shipping on long-haul interstate routes.

“It is clearly unfair for Australian transport businesses to be competing with foreign-flagged vessels that operate under third world labour practices.

“Foreign owned shipping operators do not pay Australian wages, do not pay Australian taxes, and do not employ Australian workers. Their profits are sent overseas overseas.

“What’s more, this proposal risks turning project like Inland Rail into a massive white elephant, before it’s even finished.”

You can tell your local Federal MP to keep freight on Aussie trains by going to keepfreightonaussietrains.org.au



HEALTH & SAFETY

A stronger safety net for COVID-vulnerable workers

The RTBU has launched a national campaign to better protect workers who are at significant risk of death or serious illness from COVID-19.

National Secretary Mark Diamond said while progress on an effective vaccine was encouraging, it would be a dangerous mistake for Australians to think that the pandemic had passed.

“During the pandemic, many of us have embraced zoom meetings and invested in a home office. We’ve been able to safe, secure and out of harm’s way, Mark said.

“But for many other workers in sectors like health, aged care, emergency

services, retail and transport, however, working from home is not an option.

“And for workers in those sectors who also elderly or have pre-existing health conditions, going to work during an outbreak of COVID-19 could mean putting your life on the line.”

Mark said safety net programs such as JobKeeper, Job-Seeker and pandemic leave did not cover the specific needs of COVID-vulnerable workers.

“As we plot a path to the end of the pandemic, it is important that no Australians are left behind or left exposed.


“That means putting in place a COVID Vulnerable Worker Payment to enable workers who are at high-risk risk to voluntarily stay home during a localised outbreak of COVID-19.

“The payment should enable those workers to continue to be paid their full salary by their employer, but it should be funded by the Federal Government.”



Mark said to be categorised as a ‘COVID Vulnerable Worker’ and therefore be eligible for the scheme, a worker must fall into one of the categories listed as ‘at risk’ by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Consideration should also be given to extending this to pregnant workers, and workers who have a medical reason for not wearing a mask.

Sign the petition to support COVID-Vulnerable workers at [covidvulnerableworker.com.au](https://www.covidvulnerableworker.com.au) 

IN THE WORKPLACE

Delegates Discussion Board Lights Up

A new Facebook Discussion Board has been set up to allow RTBU Delegates to share information discuss workplace issues.

The ‘closed’ group will be a safe and secure online space for information about campaigning organising, managing workplace disputes and other topics.

National Organiser (and former Delegate) Leanne Holmes said Delegates were the heart and soul of the RTBU.

“It’s the most important role in the Union, but it can also be very challenging – and at times quite isolating,” Leanne said.

“That’s why it is so important for Delegates to connect with each other, and to support each other through the good times and the difficult times.”



Leanne said Being a Delegate was a constant learning experience.

“You pick up so many skills and so much knowledge through being a Delegate - and if you don’t know the answer to something, it’s highly likely that someone else has been through the same thing before.”

South Australian Tram & Bus Delegate Lance Edwards and encouraged Delegates who are on Facebook to get involved.

“I think this page has got great potential,” Lance said.

“We’re all dealing with the same sort of issues, and many of us are now dealing with the same employers as well.

”One of the most important tasks of a delegate is to network. This group has provided me with an opportunity to do this”

“I’m really looking forward to connecting with Delegates from other branches and other divisions.”

RTBU Delegates can join the group by searching for **RTBU Delegates Discussion Board** on Facebook.

In-principle agreement reached on PN Intermodal Train Crew rollover EA

After robust negotiations, an “in-principle” agreement has been reached with Pacific National on a new Intermodal Train Crew EA.

The negotiating team has locked in the following terms for RTBU members:

A two-year Agreement

- » 2.5 per cent pay rise per year over the two years
- » A \$500 bonus upon ratification in the first year
- » A \$500 bonus on the anniversary in the second year
- » A Rollover EA which means not one condition lost

“These Negotiations have been quite extraordinary on many levels, and extremely challenging, but the outcome for RTBU Members is a good one,” said National Organiser Leanne Holmes.

“The Negotiating Team was given a mandate by the membership, and they have delivered.”

From here, both the RTBU and PN’s legal people will ensure that the EA is FWC compliant, to ensure that any changes that have been legislated since the last EA are reflected in this one.

Once that process has been completed, PN will open the access period (the time where Members review the proposed EA). And once that has finished, voting on the proposed agreement will commence.



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Union members protect public

It’s 4am on a warm spring morning and NSW Trains managers are anxiously pacing up and down platforms in Newcastle, Lithgow and Wollongong, their workforce out on the grass.

It’s only four hours into a strike members have been forced to take due to serious safety issues with the Berejiklian Government’s New Intercity Fleet (NIF).

The government had ignored members’ concerns and decided to press ahead with its ‘Mission Readiness’ test run of its South Korean built trains on Friday November 27. Now the government finds itself without the drivers and guards to staff the trains.

By 4.30am it’s all over. The government backs down and ‘Mission Readiness’ is cancelled. Strong, determined action by workers has won the day.

“It’s really disappointing that we reached this point, and railworkers had to stand up as the last line of defence in protecting the community,” said NSW Branch Secretary Alex Claassens.

“The design of this train risks commuters falling through the gaps between the train and platform, resulting in injury or death.

“The current operating system for these new trains is unsafe because it

It’s really disappointing that ... railworkers had to stand up as the last line of defence in protecting the community.





doesn't allow train guards to properly monitor people in the moments before the train departs.

"In this new train the CCTV won't pick up that someone has fallen down into the gap.

"Currently, guards can hear people yelling and keep their eyes on the platform and doors until the train pulls away - they won't under the new model.

"The people on the ground - the train guards, drivers and station staff - know these trains aren't safe."

Members in NSW had been calling for a halt to the 'Mission Readiness' test since November 20 after an Independent Safety Evaluation of the New Intercity Fleet by Klaus Clemens Engineers found serious safety concerns.

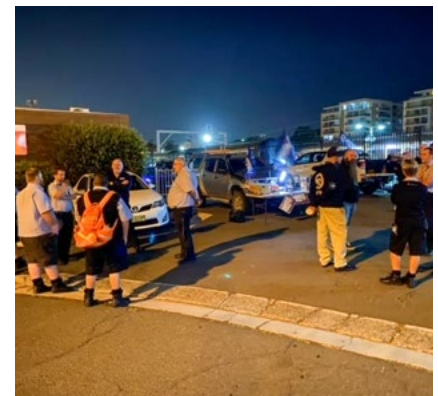
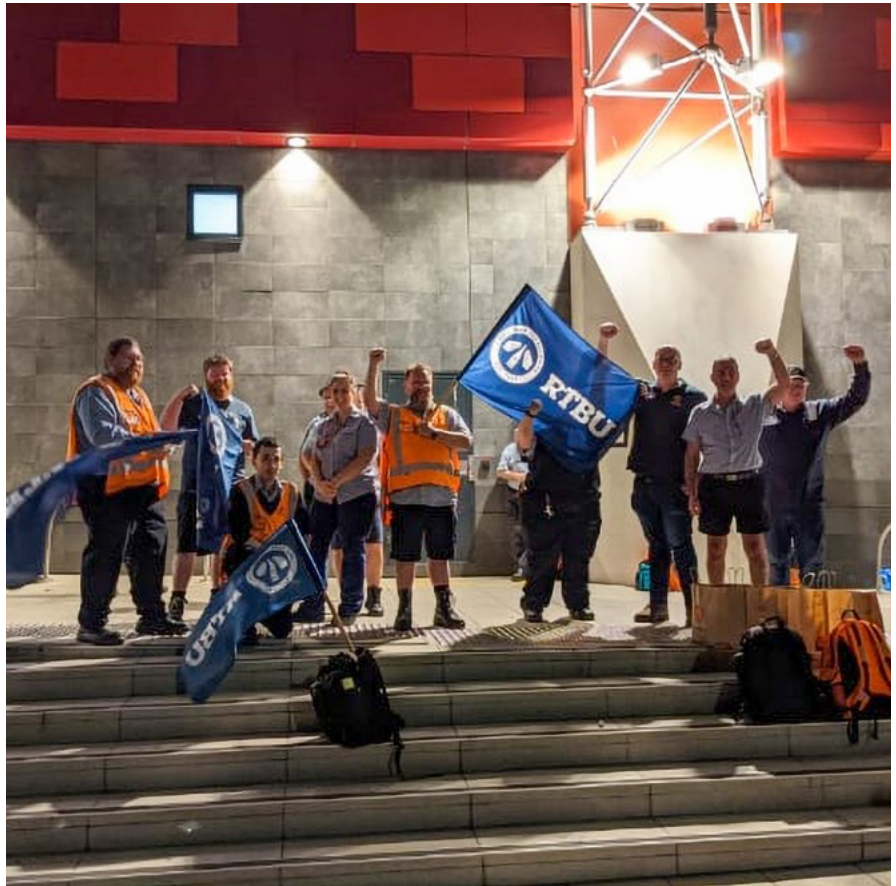
According to the report:

"NIF project does not identify all material hazards and fails to assess them to the degree necessary, hence the NIF operating model is not safe So Far As Is Reasonably Practical (SFAIRP). Particular concerns are raised with the CCTV view being obstructed by the open saloon door, shortcomings with the CCTV technology and the lack of monitoring of the platform gap."

"This independent report confirms the long-held concern of the union and rail workers that the NIF is a safety disaster waiting to happen," said Alex Claassens.

"I wrote to the Premier a full week before the 'Mission Readiness' test informing her of the report."

Government officials relied their own report which found no safety concerns - however their report was written without its author setting foot on a



NIF train or even being in Australia due to COVID-19 restrictions..

Many members are concerned the government commissioned the \$3.9 billion problem plagued trains in an attempt to reduce the role of the train guard to almost nothing, so guards can eventually be removed from trains altogether.

The 520 South Korean carriages have since cost taxpayers an extra \$1.1 billion after it was found they didn't fit tunnels, stations or tracks in the Blue Mountains.

The trains were commissioned overseas despite local manufacturers in Wollongong and Newcastle bidding for the work. A study by economist Dr Jim

Stanford from the Centre for Future Work found if the government had built locally the project would have supported 5,000 direct jobs, and 2,000 indirect jobs.

It would have also pumped \$455 million into government coffers in the form of taxes.

The Berejiklian government has spent a total of \$15.2 billion on overseas-built rolling stock, including \$8.3 billion on 22 6-car sets of metro trains from India, \$2.1 billion on 60 light rail trams from France and Spain and a cool \$900 million on 17 more Waratah series train sets from China.

Owen signs off

The golden thread which runs through Owen Doogan's career has been sticking up for others.

It's a theme he'll continue into his retirement with his work feeding the homeless and as a board member of the Queensland Community Alliance - which brings together faith groups, community organisations and unions.

Owen is stepping down after 30 years with the RTBU - 19 of those as Queensland Secretary.

As a young man growing up in Glasgow, Owen was involved in many industrial and social issues - including fighting the continuous attacks on working people's rights by the infamous Thatcher Government. After several years of union activity in Glasgow, Owen took up a position with the then National Union of Railwaymen (now the RMT) in London.

... but the one thing they really got back was respect - they demanded it and they got it.



After he moved to Australia, Owen threw himself into the union movement defending workers' rights. He joined the union in 1991 and became Queensland Branch Secretary in 2002.

By the time he took on the Branch Secretary role, Owen had experienced and observed many workers' trials and tribulations in other states and overseas, particularly relating to the expansion of precarious employment by private sector operators encroaching on what had historically been secure public sector work.

While Owen never let his attention stray from the continuous challenges of the rail, bus and tram public transport members needs, the changes in most of the freight businesses took the Union into a new world.

Owen was determined to ensure the RTBU was prepared for the inevitable spread of this to Queensland rail

operations and to maximise the protection of members rights, conditions and job security.

Over the next 15 years the rail workers in Queensland experienced the deluge of private operations commencing in the rail industry in Queensland. From one public sector company (Queensland Rail) running practically all rail activities in Queensland, the Union was faced with dozens of private operators emerging through the commencement of third-party operations, contracting out and privatisation.

This disruption to the industry came at a massive cost to workers. In particular, the privatisation of the government-owned QR National freight operation led to the callous closures of significant elements of the business such as workshops throughout the State. Communities like Ipswich, Rockhampton and Townsville woke up to find their local railway workshops were closing or sacking most of their workforces.

"It was an incredibly challenging time for members and their families," recalls Owen.

The RTBU, however, never stopped fighting for job security and the maintenance of members' conditions. Many battles had to be fought and, while not all were successful, Queensland members are now organised throughout the private sector with union-negotiated agreements in place to protect their rights.


Incoming Queensland Secretary Peter Allen says Owen's contribution to members' lives has been immeasurable.

"Plenty of other unions would have fallen over under the weight of what happened in the past 15 years," Peter said.

"We have a strong balance sheet and very strong membership, Owen has left us in terrific shape.

"And I know how proud he was to serve as RTBU National President for four years (2010-2014) representing RTBU members throughout Australia."

As well as his community work Owen looks forward to playing tennis and golf, supporting his beloved Celtic Football Club, having an occasional flutter on the ponies and spending more time with his partner, Vivienne.

 A young Owen with the late Les Crofton, who was the inaugural RTBU Queensland State Secretary.



MEET THE NEW GUY

Incoming Queensland Secretary Peter Allen is known to many as the lead negotiator for the Aurizon EAs in 2019. That was the year the union won back many of the pay and conditions taken from members three years earlier by the company's disgraceful decision to cancel agreements in the middle of bargaining.

"Last year at the bargaining table the Aurizon negotiators literally said to us 'You've got us on our knees, you've broken us', that was a great feeling," Peter said.

It was a very different feeling to three years earlier.

In the intervening period Peter and his team had been rebuilding membership and organisational strength in the coalfields and in freight.

That industrial action, and a strong media and social media campaign, ramped up pressure on the company.



"In 2016 Aurizon had reclassified hours so some shift workers no longer got penalties and so lost 20 per cent of their pay - we fixed that," Peter said.

📷 New Queensland Secretary Peter Allen.

"Others lost their work life balance due to Aurizon's dodgy manoeuvrings - we fixed that.

"For everyone else we won a decent wage settlement, 2.5% a year for 3 years, and for some even more."

"People got many conditions back and a decent wage increase, but the one thing they really got back was respect - they demanded it and they got it.

"They can walk a bit taller knowing that they got the best of Aurizon."

Owen Doogan says Peter Allen is a tough negotiator with a sharp intellect and lateral thinking skills that often achieve excellent outcomes others would miss.

"I have full faith that members will find themselves in secure hands under Peter's leadership to maximise future outcomes," Owen said.

BRANCH NEWS SA & NT

SA Government moves privatisation goal posts again

Adelaide Metro rail workers have been frustrated by confusing messages from the State Government in the lead-up to the commencement of operations under the private contractor.

"The State Government is continually moving the goalposts for rail workers, who are already dealing with the stress of having their jobs privatised," said SA/NT Branch Secretary Darren Phillips.

"For example, there is still confusion over the amount of time workers can spend on the 'redeployment list', as the State Government is appealing the recent Fair Work Commission decision on this issue.

"We've engaged a Barrister and we'll be defending the original FWC decision at a hearing which has been scheduled for 20 January."



Darren said the State Government had opted for the shortest length of time needed to execute the hand over to the private operator.

"The privatisation process has been ill conceived, poorly organised and will not deliver any savings for South Australians.

"Privatisation of essential services is never a good idea, but doing it in the middle of a health and economic crisis is just stupid.

"The skilled and professional public sector workers on Adelaide Metro trains have been delivering

high-quality to the people of South Australia, and they have kept going right through the pandemic. They do not deserve to be treated this way."

The RTBU has been campaigning against train and tram privatisation, and the SA Labor Party has come on board by promising to bring services back into public hands.

Work Less, Get Paid the Same

Work, rest, and play, in the right balance, are the secret to a happy life. And the idea is to get as much play in as possible, right?

Victorian rail maintenance workers at V-Line and Bombardier reckon they might've got close to the magic formula by writing a 36-hour week into their latest round of agreements. They will work less, but get paid the same.

It means someone working an 8-hour day not already getting RDOs now gets an extra 26 days off a year.

For someone who's already familiar with RDOs - it's an extra 13 days off a year. If you're doing eight days on and six off, it becomes seven days on and seven days off.

"Members are wrapt. It's a huge step forward for a better work life balance," said Bryan Evans, Infrastructure & Workshops Organiser in the Victorian Branch.

"This gives members more time at home with their families.

"In a typically anti-social industry, with a lot of shift work, especially at night, this gives workers up to an extra

26 days off a year to play on top of 5 weeks annual leave."

So how does it work?

With a standard RDO system based on 38 hours workers complete a 40-hour week and their employer takes two hours and puts them in a 'bank'.

After 8 hours are accrued the worker can take an RDO - typically once a month.

The same principle applies for the 36-hour week except four hours a week are accrued meaning workers get a day off every fortnight.

"What's not to love?" asked Bryan Evans. "And it works for employers too - they get a happier, less fatigued workforce."

V-Line Infrastructure workers cemented the 36-hour week into their EA in December. They are the first heavy rail operator in Australia to do so.

To ensure no loss of pay when transitioning to a 36-hour week a one off

5.57 per cent base pay increase was applied.

This came on top of a further 2.5 per cent a year for four years.

A proposed new EA with members at Bombardier (V/Line Rolling stock maintenance) to be voted on in early January, also includes a 5.57 per cent increase in pay to make up for the new 36-hour week, and 3 per cent a year pay rise for four years.

The Victorian Branch continues its march to roll out the 36-hour week across infrastructure with many contractors already adopting the 36-hour week model - including Laing O'Rourke, John Holland, Coleman Rail, McConnel Dowell, and Downer Infrastructure.

The 36-hour week was first pioneered in the Construction industry in Victoria in the early 2000s.

"It's been 15 years between drinks for the rail industry," said Bryan. "But all the sweeter for it."

Members seeking to lift the cap

The RTBU WA PTA Branch has been left with no other option than to challenge the current statewide pay cap being imposed upon their members.

The jobs and responsibilities of around 350 railcar drivers working across the Perth Metro network will significantly increase next year with the completion of two underground tunnels of around 8km in length that are also partly under the Swan River.

WA PTA Branch Secretary Joshua Dekuyer, who is leading negotiations

for a new EBA, says drivers should be paid a tunnel allowance amounting to an extra \$3,000 a year - \$2,000 a year more than the current pay increase cap.

"Unlike other states where trains going through tunnels of such length are driverless, these trains will be manned," Josh said.

"With that comes a lot of extra responsibility including being in charge of a train in case of a breakdown far underground, making sure families and the elderly are evacuated to safety.

"Being under the Swan River when something goes wrong will be challenging to say the least, and they should be compensated for the additional responsibility this brings to the role."

The RTBU is also calling on management to ensure that all railcar drivers who have to undergo additional training for the tunnelling duties will not lose out financially.

"Many of our members rely on shifts that attract penalties, so we need to ensure that if they are required to change shifts to do this training that they are recompensated for any loss in income," Josh said.

"What we are asking for is only fair. WA urban railcar drivers are amongst the lowest paid in Australia and we are just asking for them to be paid fairly.

"Our members are fully behind us and are united in this call. We are not ruling out any option at this stage but hope to achieve this modest pay rise through negotiations."

"We are not the only union in this position - there are many other public sector workers who also deserve better pay and recognition and this never-ending pay cap is simply unacceptable."

The second round of EBA talks were due to occur in early December but have been delayed to the New Year.

New deal cements a pay rise

Achieving a 9 per cent pay rise over three years in the current environment is a great result by any standard, but it was even more remarkable for workers on TasRail's cement line in Northern Tasmania.

TasRail initially offered a two per cent per year increase, but lowered the offer further when COVID-19 hit, knocking the wind out of inflation in the island state.

The improved deal was the result of a great team effort from Acting North West Delegate Dave Luxmore, National Vice President Leanne Holmes, Tasmanian Branch Secretary Ric Bean and the determined members.

All 11 workers voted on the proposed agreement, with a very comfortable majority in favour of the EBA – an outcome that Dave says demonstrates how good the deal was under the circumstances.

The group will also now work a 38-hour week, instead of the 40 hours required by previous agreements - but they won't see any reduction in pay for the reduced hours. A long standing safety bonus was also negotiated into the deal.

With pay rises of 2 per cent locked in for the last 2 years of the agreement, the new deal works out to a total pay rise of 9 per cent.

Furthermore, the new deal includes a domestic violence clause and an updated trauma leave clause.

“TasRail really had no leg to stand on as every other employee works a 38 hour week, so the team and management were fine to make that change,” Dave Luxmore said. “But it was a different story when it came to securing a pay increase.

“COVID-19 hit right in the middle of negotiations, and that's when they saw the opportunity to try and pull a fast one and just offer us a CPI rise.

“We just said a flat out ‘no’, as it was just an attempt to exploit COVID as the expense of our members. With Ric and Leanne on our side and at our meetings, it was a slam dunk.

“It helps when negotiating with management to have a solid group behind us like the cement team. The input at every stage of the process was fantastic.”

The TasRail cement drivers cover the 22km from Devonport to Railton route which runs up to six times a day, but they also work on regular trains on other routes from Burnie to Launceston.

Dave has now started negotiating a new EBA for the TasRail bulk handlers in Burnie, with the full Tasmanian RTBU team to follow with the TasRail General Agreement later in 2021.

📷 Left, Tasmanian Secretary Ric Bean, Rail Division President Nick Shackleton and Acting Delegate Dave Luxmore. Above left, a cement Line train.

