



WA BRANCH NEWSLETTER

FROM THE SECRETARY

The last three months have been the most hectic period in which I have been your Secretary. We have seen a huge increase in industrial concerns. My only conclusion is that the rail industry at large is over-stretched. All rail and infrastructure companies are running on overtime and pressure.

A swirling job market has developed between companies, and our members are being traded like bananas. Not all of this is negative, members have the opportunity of playing the market, this is certainly happening in Pilbara infrastructure and Kalgoorlie.

Pacific National Kalgoorlie remains a constant problem for us. While there are genuine industrial concerns, these have been aggravated by what seems to be recalcitrant Kalgoorlie management. We are in legal process with PN.

WorkSafe is investigating fires at Kwinana Aurizon which allegedly threatened our members who were on duty. Your union is horrified that such an incident could possibly occur from a company of this size which highlights “zero harm”.

WATCO is engaged in a reasonably good harvest, we are concerned about its training, including retention of staff. WATCO has agreed to meet with your union and workshop future training.

You are maybe aware that WATCO has successfully bidden against Aurizon Kalgoorlie for the BHP Leonora contract. This is a particularly spirited business approach at a time when they struggle to meet the current harvest. WATCO does not have any capital hardware in Kalgoorlie.

Railtrain will be a considerable employer in this contract. While they are not popular with national RTBU, we are keen to do business because this company is developing a significant footprint in WA, particularly infrastructure.

We have reached good industrial outcomes with Roy Hill who are probably not accustomed to dealing with unionised employees. This is a considerable win for your union considering Roy Hill has huge firepower.

Downer’s payroll software has been causing all sorts of problems for our members. Eventually it gets sorted but it is a constant headache. Downer is employing an additional 100 infrastructure workers.

More of our members are working for Switch and Wabtec, so Kristy and I need to meet up and develop a working relationship with the company. Kristy and I are planning on a Pilbara visit.

This is just a small glance at some of our issues.

Both ARC and WATCO enterprise agreements are set to commence in the middle of this year. Legal agent John Theodorsen will head up the negotiations. While this is not cheap, we take these EBAs very seriously and want the best.

You may know that your union has been meeting with MacArthur Minerals over the last 18 months. MacArthur holds 1.1 billion tonnes of iron ore in the Yilgarn area between Southern Cross and Leonora. However, there is a surface layer which needs to be transported by Christmas. There is a strong possibility that this will be trucked to Mt Gibson and railed to Geraldton Port.

As a union we are trying to reduce trucking and find an all-rail solution, however port capacity is overburdened with MRL contracts. We were looking at Esperance, but major track upgrades will limit tonnage for a few years.

I wish to announce that the state government contacted myself and sent through the documentation advising that Infrastructure Australia has elevated Tier 3 grain lines to priority funding assessment.

This is a great result for the WA Branch - 300 kms of new build and hundreds of jobs could be created. There is the potential of a significant rolling stock build also. We will work with the government to obtain the best outcome for the Wheat Belt.

Your union has been leading the charge on Tier 3 since November 2019 and it has been a lot of work. We expect confirmation before the National budget in May.

In closing, the RTBU WA Branch wishes both the Aurizon drivers involved in February's horrific level crossing smash at Kalgoorlie all the best. I visited Ray in hospital - he is in good spirits.

Craig Mckinley
Secretary

EXCESSIVE HOURS AT WATCO

At the time of writing, we are concerned that training and compliance at WATCO still lacks professionalism and maturing. We are running a prosecution against WATCO for excessively long hours. Unfortunately, this a symptom of greater problems which remain embedded.

Pacific National drivers have voted "yes" to their two-year EA rollover. This rollover means that some significant changes which need to be made cannot happen. It is difficult for our West Australian workers to get a voice with the voting power of the eastern states. PN remain short-staffed which is putting pressure on drivers and terminal operators.



ORGANISING UPDATE

It has been a whirlwind 12 weeks for me and an incredibly busy period for the RTBU WA. I have assisted in nearly a dozen issues - many of which went through legal proceedings with the assistance of John Theodorsen. All have had positive outcomes for our members.

In a large number of cases I was able to negotiate a positive outcome without the need for legal interjection, and I am providing continued assistance with other issues that are still being addressed through the legal pathways.

Craig and I were able to hold discussions with the Watco management team to try to address the persistent rostering issues, but to no avail. Despite our best efforts it seems the rostering problems have not been adequately addressed and the company has left us no choice but to pursue these EA breaches with court proceedings. I am also working hard on addressing the lack of training not only for new employees but for all its employees. Hopefully with my persistence the lack of training and guidance will soon be rectified.

Unfortunately for our members employed by Aurizon, the RTBU WA has been inundated with issues from every depot in the state. These issues range from general pay roll disputes to serious safety violations and breaches of the EBA. While I have handled a lot of the smaller issues myself I have had no option but to incorporate WorkSafe and ONSR officials to hold Aurizon accountable for their shortcomings and failures to address these issues adequately.

I had the great pleasure of meeting some of our Pacific National members in the Kewdale depot and Kalgoorlie recently. I understand that the EA negotiations have consumed a lot of the National Office's time. From discussions we held with our members the lack of acknowledgement from PN management has been a huge point of contention. I will continue to assist all our members to achieve positive outcomes on any issue, big or small.

The RTBU WA has assisted with many queries and issues being raised from our North West members, especially out of the EDI Downer workforce. We have had many positive outcomes when handling all these issues. It has been so uplifting knowing that by providing the support we have to all our members up north we are really expanding our membership base in a new untouched region.

It honestly feels like I have been on the job for years but it's only been 12 weeks. I wanted to thank all our members for your patience while I have been finding my feet in this position. Please keep safe and look out for your fellow worker and remember your safety comes first, not production.

Kristy Martin
Organiser

NEW DELEGATE IN THE NORTH WEST

My name is Barry O'Sullivan I am a rail infrastructure worker and track protection officer based in the vast Pilbara region of Western Australia.

Originally from Ireland, but living in WA over eight years now, I have been working in rail infrastructure since 2002 - starting off on high-speed passenger lines in London where I lived at the time, and the last eight years working on heavy haul railways for Rio Tinto and BHP amongst others.

I have recently been appointed one of two RTBU Workplace Delegates for the vast North West region of WA, where we are making strong inroads in membership among rail infrastructure workers based up here.

For too long their voices have not been heard. We are hoping to change that, and we already are doing it. I believe passionately in union representation, and in particular a union that caters for all rail workers. Whether you drive the trains or fix the tracks, we are all rail industry workers and should be represented by a strong union, which I believe the RTBU is.

I look forward to continuing my work with the union and increasing or membership so all rail workers feel they have a voice and representation.

Remember, strength in unity!

Barry O'Sullivan

Delegate

CHAOS IN KALGOORLIE

Tumultuous times abound at Aurizon's West Kalgoorlie depot recently with the loss of BHP's Nickel West contract to WATCO. WATCO took over the keys from Aurizon on the 31st of March 2021.

WATCO is breaking new ground at the Hampton Ballast Siding site busily laying the foundations for what will become the Hampton Intermodal Hub.

Speculation is rife about WATCO's capacity to service the contract, which Aurizon drivers (if any) will change shirts in order to cash-in and assist WATCO with what is sure to be an epic undertaking in starting up new operations. I am pleased to report that even through this period, Union meeting attendance has remained strong with members not faltering when it comes to displays of solidarity.

In other good news for the depot, the two West Kalgoorlie drivers recently involved in the truck collision are recovering well and we all look forward to their return to good health.

Tony Grund

President – Kalgoorlie Aurizon



KEEP FREIGHT ON AUSSIE TRAINS DELEGATION

PN Delegate from Perth David Bell joined a national delegation of intermodal freight train crew to Federal Parliament during March.

The purpose of the trip to was to speak to politicians from all parties about proposed changes to shipping laws that will make it easier for foreign-flagged ships to take business away from long-haul rail freight operators.

RTBU Delegates spoke about the benefits of rail to local communities, and the need for a level playing field across the different freight modes.

All the MPs that we spoke to were interested and engaged in the issues, and some admitted that they not previously considered the impact that changes to shipping laws can have on other elements of our transport supply chains.

David ably led the discussion with the Member for Perth and Shadow Minister for Western Australia Patrick Gorman. Other politicians that we spoke to included:

- Shadow Minister for Transport Hon Catherine King MP;
- Shadow Minister for the Environment and Water Terri Butler MP;
- Shadow Minister for Cities and Urban Infrastructure Andrew Giles MP;
- Leader of the Greens Adam Bandt MP;
- Member for Kennedy Bob Katter MP; and
- Member for Herbert Phillip Thompson MP.

The Member for O'Connor (covering Kalgoorlie) Rick Wilson MP also agreed to meet with the delegation but unfortunately was called away for parliamentary business at the last moment.

Stewart Prins

National Executive Officer



RTBU HEADS NORTH

Excerpt from the RTBU National Member newsletter, Transport NOW.

Hundreds of rail building and rail maintenance workers in the Pilbara may soon benefit from being part of the RTBU.

Organisers are heading north next year to conduct the RTBU's first ever industrial visit to the region.

Branch Secretary Craig Mckinley said many workers in the industry are currently employed by contractors and labour hires and for any one project there could be four, five, six or even seven sub-contractors.

Craig said: "It's largely un-unionised up there, which means anything can happen and can mean that workers are being charged different rates.

"It's very confusing and what we will need to do is unpack this mess and work out the structure so we can start reaching out to workers and seeing how we can help them."

Craig says with a 143km new rail line on the way from John Holland and a whole host of other projects in the North West region, there is potential for recruitment of hundreds of new members.

The CFMEU covers locomotive drivers, but the RBTU will focus on those engaged in rail building and maintenance.

Craig added: "We will not be seeking to steal any members and the work the CFMEU has done in the region is respected. What we are planning will only expand union presence across the Pilbara and beyond and ensure pay and conditions are maintained and improved wherever possible."

Organiser Kristy Martin will be leading the charge up there.

We will keep you informed of progress and how the very first industrial visit pans out.

