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Virgin pilots negotiate historic enterprise agreement as more workers turn to collective bargaining

An historic collective agreement negotiated for V Australia international pilots is a welcome sign that the Fair Work Act is delivering better pay and conditions for working Australians, say unions.

The agreement took two years to negotiate and offers significant improvements to the individual contracts under which Virgin's long haul pilots were previously employed, including immediate pay rises of up to 28%.

The agreement, negotiated by Australia's newest union, VIPA, is currently subject to a vote of approval by Virgin pilots.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said record numbers of Australian workers were being covered by collective agreements.

"This enterprise agreement at Virgin would not have been possible under WorkChoices, which emphasised unfair individual contracts and placed major barriers in the way of collective bargaining," Ms Kearney said.

"The Fair Work Act has restored some of the balance to collective bargaining, allowing employers and workers and their unions to reach agreements more efficiently and fairly.

"Most importantly, there is an enforceable right to a collective agreement with good faith bargaining orders, and some barriers have been removed to worker representation.

"More workers are now covered by collective agreements than before: more than 43% of the workforce.

"There is a clear union membership premium with the typical worker covered by a collective agreement earning 67% more than the award, and benefitting from annual pay rises of about 4%.

"Collective agreements typically also provide better job security than individual contracts.

"And contrary to the misleading rhetoric of employer groups, industrial disputes have fallen under the Fair Work Act.

"Virgin Australia has recognised the benefits of collective bargaining, and this agreement at one of Australia's best known companies sends a positive message to other employers."

The pay rises negotiated by VIPA will increase the typical Virgin Captain's pay by 21% immediately. Cruise Relief Officers would receive a 28% rise, and First Officers 18%. In addition to the pay rise, the proposed agreement at Virgin Australia provides for comprehensive consultation between management and pilots, better measurement of overtime, and a new insurance system for pilots.

Negotiations are well-advanced for a first-ever enterprise agreement for Virgin short haul pilots.

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