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## New Telstra agreement is a win for employees and sends a strong message about rights at work

The approval of a new union-negotiated collective agreement covering 10,000 employees at Telstra is a major achievement for union members and the Fair Work Act, says the ACTU.

A new enterprise agreement which was resoundingly approved by Telstra staff will deliver an 8% pay rise between now and next October.

It completes a major reversal of the aggressive approach to industrial relations adopted by the previous Telstra management and provides a foundation for a more constructive and co-operative relationship in the future.

ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said this would be important given Telstra's proposed role in the construction of the National Broadband Network as it sought to attract and retain a skilled workforce. He said the pay rises in the collective agreement were in contrast to the new announcement of a pay freeze for about 6000 staff on Australian Workplace Agreements and non-union agreements.

"Telstra is an iconic Australian company and the negotiation of a new collective agreement sends a powerful message to the rest of the business community about respect for fundamental workplace rights to collective bargaining and union membership," Mr Lawrence said.

"This is also a tribute to the thousands of Telstra workers who stood up to defend their rights and voted to reject the repeated attempts by management to divide the workforce and pressure them into sub-standard job contracts. For too long under the previous management, Telstra clung to WorkChoices even after Australians voted to restore rights at work."

The new collective agreement will cover almost 10,000 workers for the next two years. It provides guaranteed pay rises of 8% on top of a 2% increase last October. It also preserves existing terms and conditions, and includes access to arbitration by Fair Work Australia for the first time in many years.

But about 6000 Telstra employees on Australian Workplace Agreements or other non-union agreements were this week told their pay would be frozen until at least March next year.

"The pay freeze shows how one-sided AWAs are when an employer can unilaterally decide there will be no pay rise, without any negotiation or consultation," Mr Lawrence said.

"By contrast, the new enterprise agreement shows the benefits of collective bargaining.

"During the life of the new enterprise agreement, unions will be working to ensure that all employees of Telstra ultimately benefit from better wages and conditions and have equal rights.

"With reports of skill shortages in the telecommunications industry as it ramps up to build the National Broadband Network, this will be in Telstra's own interests."

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