

Frequently Asked Questions for Councils Joining the Multi-Employer Agreement

Background

Workers at Darebin, Greater Dandenong, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Merri-bek and Yarra have secured the largest worker-led authorisation to pursue multi-employer bargaining in Australia.

This is the best opportunity to significantly improve pay and conditions for local government workers.

Now workers at Knox, Frankston, Melton, Whittlesea and Wyndham have a choice: either continue bargaining for a single EA (which is what your employer wants to do), or join with 10,000+ workers from 8 other councils who are fighting for historic improvements to pay through a new multi-employer agreement.

Single EA outcomes

The system of single EA bargaining has failed local government workers. Employers have manipulated this system to delay and undermine negotiations, refuse to negotiate constructively, divide workers, and hold your wages back.

This system has seen workers lose conditions and suffer declining real wages for the past decade.

What are the benefits of MEB?

Real Power for Workers

Unlike single EAs, under multi-employer bargaining employers cannot put an agreement out to a vote without the agreement of the union. This removes the primary tactic that employers use to undermine negotiations and hold wages back. The MEB system guarantees more power for workers, and forces employers to negotiate constructively. Most importantly, this system will protect your existing terms and conditions of employment.

Unite and Fight as an Industry

Multi-employer bargaining gives local government workers our first ever opportunity to unite as an industry and use our collective power to fight for improvements to pay and working conditions. Our Metro Multi-Employer Agreement will already cover approximately 10,000 local government workers!

Historic pay rise – Fix Local Government Funding

The Victorian Government's rate cap has constrained wages and starved councils of essential funding. Through the MEA we are fighting to recover from the recent decline in real wage growth (with a "catch up" payment of 10%) and pressure the state government to ensure local government services are properly funded.

What will the Metro MEA look like for workers?

ASU members involved in the metro multi-employer agreement are fighting for:

- **Pay rises of 10%/4%/4%/4% or \$ increase + backpay;**
- Improvements to conditions including OH&S, Dispute Resolution, Discipline, Replacement of vacancies, Parental Leave, Reproductive Health, and others; and
- All existing terms and conditions (ie. your current EA) to be locked in and protected. **Nobody will go backwards or lose their existing conditions.**

Joining the multi-employer agreement will mean that you protect your existing working conditions, whilst gaining the benefit of pay rises and any other improvements that are won in the Metro MEA. It also builds the collective strength of local government workers to continue fighting for improvements in future agreements.

How do we enter the Metro MEA?

A council can only “rope in” to the metro MEA once the agreement had been finalised and approved by the Fair Work Commission **and** their current EA has expired.

(Employers can simply consent to the application, but this is yet to happen.)

Therefore, we must demonstrate that a majority of workers at each Council support joining the multi-employer agreement. This can be demonstrated by a petition or through a ballot.

Once a majority of workers demonstrate their support to be roped into the finalised MEA, the ASU can then make the application to vary the multi-employer agreement to include coverage of that Council.

Because the metro multi-employer agreement has not-yet been finalised, it is likely that a final vote of all staff who will be covered under the agreement will be required to demonstrate that you understand the pay and benefits that you will receive, and wish to proceed with that application.

Can workers still make changes to the current EA?

As workers will be “roping in” to a certified agreement, it is likely that workers will forego the formal opportunity to negotiate and make changes to your current EA this time around (in the same way as single EA bargaining). The ASU could, however, still seek to vary your existing conditions – for example, through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) – but this would be contingent upon your employer agreeing to such a process.

It is worth remembering that any such changes (and indeed, any outcomes delivered through single EA negotiations) are always subject to your employer’s agreement.

Our advice to workers is: gaining the benefit of the historic pay and conditions ASU members are fighting for through the multi-employer agreement – not to mention the increased power of joining with 10,000+ local government workers to fight for further improvements in successive agreements – is worth foregoing the opportunity to potentially influence your existing EA.

