

Lots of news but first, how can anyone run a business like this?

No increase in membership fees in 2010

No fee increase in 2010

2010 will be the seventh year with an annual membership fee of \$398. At a time when everything is going up, this is a bit hard to believe.

Since the \$398 fee was set in 2004, each year when we keep it at that level we announce it to members and make jokes about how we should win a prize from the Local Government Financial Professionals, or someone like that, in recognition of our shrewd financial management. We never do, of course, but we know you appreciate great value for money. We would love to get a prize from the LGFP (a subset of IMM) because we just don't get enough people in the office in short-sleeved shirts with multiple coloured pens.

If inflation has been running around 3% for those intervening years that means our fees (let's think about this, seven years at 3% plus compound interest equals, um, well quite a lot) are effectively about 22.5% or so cheaper than they were in 2004. While councils worry about whether they provide the best value, top value or value of any sort at all, we can be proud of this.

The people who are the real heroes who make this possible are our delegates who recruit members to keep our membership at a respectable level to allow us to continue what the union does without an increase.

Remember, the more members you recruit, the longer we can keep this improbable financial triumph going.

And, just to help you with recruitment...

In 2010 we will be re-instituting our recruitment reward system. For every three members recruited, we will send you a fabulous bottle of wine.

Get recruiting now, and if you fax the application form to our office and you write on it your name and that you want to be part of the 2010 recruitment campaign, we will include any new members recruited in December as part of the deal.

BPB still working at avoiding creating the monster



Our October depaNews advised of version 3 of the BPB proposals to accredit council staff. Less onerous than the fiasco which was version 2, depa and the industry generally continued to find the proposal threatening.

Our November submission to the BPB ([link](#)) noted that version 3 was nowhere near as horrifying as version 2 but there were a number of things that we did want to talk to them about.

As a summary, we thought the idea of running a council accreditation regime which relied solely on the recommendations of the council alongside an accreditation regime for private certifiers which was more rigorous, made sense. It recognized that councils regulated and controlled their own staff and that there was no-one much controlling some of the private certifiers. So different levels of scrutiny needed to apply.

So, if it was going to be acceptable to recognize this different way of operating, why should it end? Our submission concluded with this:

“We can live with the documentation but the proposal to phase out the more flexible, respectful and broader qualification/experience requirement over two or three years would require the reorganization of every Council building/development Department and remove the efficient multi-skilled professional role operating in most Council.”

We have told them we would like to talk about this and we are still waiting.

Just how bad is the monster being created by the BPB remains to be seen. It may be fully revealed to start breathing and terrorizing the industry in 2012 or 2013.

What’s UWS doing with the environmental health course? Apart from establishing a consultation timeframe counter-productive to maximizing input?

We are not really sure. depa was one of many organisations which responded to the UWS after it called for submissions. We made the point in our response ([link](#)) that the extremely short timeframe established by the Change Management Team would not allow many councils to respond because of meeting cycles and the period also included

school holidays which could prejudice more councils where there may be only one or two people effected.

The University contacted us by phone to discuss our concerns and has now invited us and other non-specified stakeholders to a discussion about their plans next week (invitation letter with some explanation [link](#)). We want to know why they would abandon training environmental health professionals, and focus instead on training more lawyers and managers. No observation necessary.

Our Vice President Andrew Spooner will attend the meeting on 7 December and we will provide news from Andrew in the December issue of depaNews

Superannuation dispute almost resolved

When depa filed a dispute with 83 councils in May over who was going to be paying the increased “compulsory employer contribution” to superannuation for employees on total remuneration packages, we didn’t really know what to expect. One of the good things the Industrial Relations Commission can do is to manage the unmanageable and set enforceable timeframes.

It didn’t take too long to get more than 100 councils to agree to pay the increased contribution but there remained a rump of difficult councils. All in all, 95% of councils effected did the right thing.

The Industrial Relations Commission is conducting a process of a “private arbitration” as part of this dispute for the last belligerent and mean councils refusing to pay. The parties still in dispute have agreed to let the Commission mediate and conclude this with a recommendation binding on all parties. The Judge has already been through this process with Ballina and the decision is on hold until all the final councils are resolved. This prevents prejudice.

On 7 December Justice Staff will privately arbitrate and resolve the issue for Blue Mountains and Wyong and this will be the end of it. What a relief.

Given that more than 100 councils have agreed to pay the lot and a resentful five or six have reached local agreements to pay something less than that, that we now have only a few councils left, is a good sign.

Liverpool remains outstanding. They had better get their collective fingers out before 7 December.

Special awards will be announced in the forthcoming end-of-year issue of depaNews so everyone will know who have been the problem people and which have been the problem councils in this long-running dispute. And which councils may breach the Local Government Act too.

Best practice NSW Industrial Relations Commission to continue for local government employees

We argued strenuously in the debate about WorkChoices that the Awards and the general protection provided by the NSW industrial relations system needed to be preserved. The Commission has a proud history of impartially managing industrial relations for more than a century.

In the last couple of weeks the NSW Government has decided to hand over control of most NSW workers to the Federal Commission - but not for employers of the Crown, nor for employees in local government. This is welcome news.

While it remains open to a new Government in NSW (and who could imagine that happening!) to change their mind and refer local government off to the Federal Commission (a sad day for us) we remain happily ensconced in the NSW system for the next couple of years.

Councillors behaving badly at Parramatta

In September we reported on a dispute at Parramatta Council following a resolution of the Council critical of staff. Unfounded, based on ignorance, venal, poisonous, offensive and wrong, it defied belief that the old blokes who are councillors at Parramatta didn't understand that there was a "new" Local Government Act which made it clear that it was the general manager's responsibility, and not theirs, to manage staff.

It also defied belief that the General Manager allowed this to occur.

The dispute continues in the Industrial Relations Commission and resumes later this month. More news in our light-hearted, satirical and amusing end-of-year issue.

But, as a bit of an indication of what life is like living back in the olden days at Parramatta, the Lord Mayor Paul Garrard, as one of his first edicts after his election in September, abolished Mufti Day for those commoners employed by the council who he may need to summon to his Mayoral Chambers without notice.

He wouldn't want them to be disrespectfully under-dressed.



Parramatta Lord Mayor Paul Garrard waits to greet a commoner

2010 Award discussions to start early next year

The Local Government (State) Award expires at the end of October 2010. The pay increase we all enjoyed (at least those covered by the State Award) in November was the last increase under that Award.

A new Award will need to be negotiated from 1 November 2010 to provide a pay increase from that date.

It's hard to imagine that this is going to be a pleasant process. Most councils find their resources stretched for a variety of reasons: the Global Financial Crisis, lost investment income and the unforeseen increases in the compulsory employer contribution to the Defined Benefits Scheme were three good ones, but often it's because they are simply unsustainable businesses.

Show us the well cashed-up council, wanting to establish generous performance rewards, provide enough employees to get the work done in a stress and hazard free environment, proper funding for training and improving the quality of life of their employees and we can negotiate a separate arrangement with them. Wow, look at those pigs fly!

The reality is that many councils are trading insolvent and, if they were public companies operating under the Corporations Act, their directors would be prosecuted.

This year North Sydney Council proposed to the unions that the performance reward system, operating on a 12 month cycle almost concluded, should be abandoned and the employees working hard to satisfy those performance targets should walk away empty-handed regardless of their expectations and the Council's commitment to them. We all said no, but if it happens at North Sydney Council, who knows what can happen elsewhere?

So let's not kid ourselves. We need to keep our expectations realistic next year to avoid disappointment.

Look out for our next issue in December

In December we will publish the final issue of the year. It will be serious of course but will also be light-hearted, satirical, rewarding of those who deserve a special accolade for surpassing the normal expectations of management excellence and more.

Will Dr. Peter Brady make an appearance? What will the Lord Mayor of Parramatta be wearing next? And who is the mystery Old Testament character?

When we published depaNews as a tabloid from December 1984 to September 1997, we published it under the masthead "Local Government's Most Unruly Tabloid". This inspirational masthead will return in December.

Ian Robertson
Secretary