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Schweppes pre-arbitration negotiations begin Thursday

Negotiations between United Voice and Schweppes begin this Thursday in a bid to resolve their protracted enterprise bargaining dispute before it moves to a workplace determination.

Commissioner Suzanne Jones will oversee the talks, which follow the decision by Senior Deputy President Les Kaufman to order the termination of industrial action at the company's Tullamarine workplace on the basis that it was causing economic harm to some employees (see [Related Article](#)).

United Voice Victorian branch assistant secretary Ben Redford told *Workplace Express* that the union is "hopeful" of progress in the mandatory 21-day negotiation period, particularly on the company's plan to introduce 12-hour shifts.

"If we can't convince [Schweppes] of the problems with their plan, however, we will do our best to convince the full bench".

Redford said that he understood that Schweppes workers at some other facilities were on 12-hour shifts, but the employees and union were convinced that these shifts would be detrimental for workers at Tullamarine.

"We think there would be logistical problems, but we are most concerned about the adverse impact they would have on our members' work/life balance and, possibly, their occupational health and safety".

Workers have returned to work in response to the FWA termination order.

Reports of enterprise deal premature, says Holden

Holden says media reports today that it has struck a new enterprise deal are premature, while the AMWU has confirmed that workers are set to vote on a proposal that would increase wages by 18.3% to 22.2% over three years.

The union said the deal to be put to workers pays 3% a year, plus bonus payments of \$1750 in the first year and \$1000 in the second to recognise employees' loyalty during the GFC, when they reduced their working hours to avoid lay-offs.

Holden said in a statement that it wasn't in a position to comment on the enterprise deals "until they are ratified, which is expected in the coming weeks".

"When the EBAs are ratified we will share the accurate details, which are vastly different to the way it was represented today.

"We're confident Holden's EBA will show we've created a pay structure that rewards all of our employees when we deliver efficiency, quality and profitability improvements", it said.

Innox to replace Ridout as AiG chief executive

AiG has made an internal appointment to replace outgoing chief executive Heather Ridout, who leaves the organisation in April.

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Its director of international and government relations since 2008, [Innes Willox](#), will take up the position in May.

Before joining AiG, Willox was Australia's consul-general in Los Angeles for two years.

He had a four-year stint as Singapore Airlines' global head of public affairs and also served as chief of staff to then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer.

He had a 10-year career as a journalist with Fairfax Media, including chief of staff and chief political correspondent in Canberra for *The Age*.

Greens bill requires stronger "business reasons" for refusing requests from carers

Greens IR spokesperson Adam Bandt's private members bill extending the right to request flexible work also raises the bar for employers who might refuse to grant requests to carers of disabled children.

The current flexibility provision entitles parents of pre-school children and carers of disabled children up to the age of 18 to request flexible working arrangements and allows employers to refuse on "reasonable business grounds".

The [Fair Work Amendment \(Better Work/Life Balance\) Bill 2012](#), introduced to Parliament yesterday, extends the right to request to parents of children up to 18 and to all carers.

It maintains the same grounds for refusal, but for carers, it introduces a new threshold for refusal, on the basis of "serious countervailing business reasons".

As [foreshadowed](#) in *Workplace Express* on Friday, the bill empowers FWA to hear appeals.

The bill allows an employee or union whose request has been refused to bring an appeal, or the federal age, disability or sex discrimination commissioner, and for FWA to make a flexible working arrangement order.

In his [second reading speech](#), Bandt said the current request provision was "well-intentioned" but "narrow and unenforceable".

Bandt said his bill didn't override management prerogative, but "simply ensures full and proper consideration is given and provides an enforceable right and oversight from Fair Work Australia".

[Fair Work Amendment \(Better Work/Life Balance\) Bill 2012](#)

[Explanatory memorandum](#)

[Second reading speech by Greens MP for Melbourne Adam Bandt, February 13, 2012](#)

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives is due today to resume debating the *Building and Construction Industry Improvement Amendment (Transition to Fair Work) Bill*.

FWA calls conference to settle equal pay order

Fair Work Australia equal pay bench member Senior Deputy President Jennifer Acton will chair a conference in Melbourne next Tuesday to seek to settle the order to reflect the landmark [equal remuneration ruling](#) on February 1.

[Notice of listing for Tuesday, February 21](#)

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