

## IN BRIEF

### EBA win for workers

Workers at the Shannon Creek Storage facility “thought it was Christmas” when they received their clothing allowance off Leighton’s recently, according to Port Macquarie-based Organiser Jim Hutcheon. The hand-over was part of an EBA, negotiated by Hutcheon and CFMEU Assistant State Secretary Peter Zaboyak for workers on the \$200 million dam project near Grafton.

“It’s one of the better agreements going around and to secure it under the current conditions is a real feather in our cap,” Hutcheon said. The EBA includes a \$25 a day travel allowance and all the “bells and whistles” such as ACIRT, CBUS, UPlus and clothing.

“People in the city might think so what, but here in the regions those types of conditions are almost unheard of,” Hutcheon said.

He said Leighton’s had hired a lot of workers from the Grafton area and none of them had ever heard of a clothing allowance. “They thought it was Christmas,” he said.

### Pacific Highway deal

The CFMEU has secured a combined EBA for civil and construction work with Abigroup for its \$1.5 billion, 10-year program of works on the northern NSW stretch of the Pacific Highway. Hutcheon said Abigroup used the WorkChoices laws to its advantage, but the CFMEU had still been able to negotiate a good deal for its members. He said the union faced a tough battle in the northern part of the state as workers were being actively discouraged from joining the union. “In some cases if subbies know a bloke is in the union he won’t get a job,” Hutcheon said. “We had one bloke who was hunted out of Ballina because the local labour hire company spread the word that he was very active in the union.”

# Steve discovers the power in a union



## UNITED FRONT

Steve Quennell with daughter Renee, 12, and partner Anne Sawyer outside their Central Coast

**It was a hard lesson**, but Steve Quennell now knows there is power in the union.

In November, plant operator Quennell and his colleagues turned up for work with Dance Contracting at Erina, on the Central Coast, only to be told their jobs were gone and there was no money.

According to Quennell, he and his fellow workers were shocked even though Central Coast CFMEU Organiser Pomare Auimatagi had been visiting the site urging them to sign up with the union because the company was looking bad.

Auimatagi had been given the heads-up by North Coast Organiser Jim Hutcheon, who had 18 men working for Dance on a Port Macquarie site.

“I couldn’t convince them,” Auimatagi recalls, “then the day it happened I was at the airport flying out for my Christmas holidays and I got the call.”

The CFMEU stepped in after the men joined the union and managed to secure more than \$75,000 in backpay for the 33 workers affected at Port

Macquarie and Erina. It is still chasing superannuation and other entitlements through the liquidators.

Auimatagi said he was determined to get money in the workers’ hands before Christmas.

“I was running around at 10.30pm on December 22 trying to get the cheques to the blokes.”

That type of commitment impressed Quennell.

“I was deadset against unions and now I’m all for them. I can’t talk highly enough about what they’ve done for us,” he said.

“If you’ve got people like the union behind you, you don’t get the trouble.”

Quennell, an Englishman who has been here since 1966, said the affair had politicised him and he was now keen to get his citizenship so he could vote John Howard out at the federal election, due late this year.

“I actually think it’s important that I vote. This

experience has meant I think about what’s going on – at the workplace especially.”

And his message to other building workers on the Central Coast? “Without a doubt they’re mad if they don’t sign up to the union.”

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