

Unions at war with super two over jobs

EXCLUSIVE

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Unions have threatened to ramp up their campaign against two industry superannuation funds after electricity distributor Ausgrid embarked on a new round of job cuts.

Weeks after outsourcing jobs to India, Ausgrid, which is majority controlled by Australian Super and IFM Investors, revealed it was closing a call centre and axing 25 per cent of staff who respond when faults, emergencies, fires and storms cut power supplies

'These cuts are not just bad for workers, they're bad for consumers'

DAVE MCKINLEY
ELECTRICAL TRADES UNION

Former ACTU secretary Dave Oliver is deputy chairman of Australian Super and former Labor minister Greg Combet, who is also a former ACTU secretary, is deputy chairman of IFM Investors. Union leaders Daniel Walton and Paul Bastian are on the Australian Super board.

NSW Electrical Trades Union secretary Dave McKinley yesterday warned that unions were preparing to significantly intensify their campaign against Ausgrid.

He said Ausgrid claimed it needed to cut jobs to reduce power prices, but 2144 full-time jobs had been lost since 2011 and prices had still gone up. "What is most extraordinary is that these attacks on working people are being perpetrated by a company majority owned by industry super funds," he said. "These cuts are not just bad for workers, they're bad for consumers."

"You can't axe a quarter of the people who provide the first point of contact during emergencies and power outages without it leading to nooner service and

slower response times. If things don't change at Ausgrid, and change soon, Australian Super, IFM Investors and Ausgrid management can expect to see a major escalation in industrial activity as workers fight back against these repeated attacks."

In the latest cuts, Ausgrid management told a quarter of staff at its customer contact centres—11 out of 44 positions—were redundant. The call centre in Sydney will also be closed, with only one centre remaining, in Newcastle.

Due to a job protection guarantee implemented by the NSW government before last year's privatisation, Ausgrid is unable to make the workers forcibly redundant. The union said the workers were required to sit in a room by themselves from 9am to 5pm each day until they accepted a voluntary redundancy. As they no longer worked evenings or weekends, they were not entitled to shift allowances, cutting their take-home pay by 30 per cent.

"Ausgrid are trying to game the job guarantees that were put in place by Fred Nile and the NSW government ahead of privatisation," Mr McKinley said.

"The ETU has been forced to take action in the Fair Work Commission to protect these workers' wages but Ausgrid is fighting this in order to cut these workers' take-home pay."

An Ausgrid spokesman said the company was going through a period of significant change as it built a more efficient and cost-effective business to keep prices for customers as low as possible.

He said three of the 11 workers had expressed interest in accepting a "generous" voluntary redundancy offer. "We understand these changes can be challenging for our staff and we are supporting them by providing them with the skills to cope with ongoing change and transition to new roles," the spokesman said.

Ausgrid outsourced 35 jobs to an Indian consortium and compelled some of the affected Australian workers to go to India to train their foreign replacements.