

Dear Local Mayors & Stakeholders,

Please find below on behalf of our Northern District Secretary, Jim Wilson:

Dear Valued Stakeholders,

I am writing to update you on the ongoing negotiations regarding the Wilmar Sugar and Renewables (Wilmar) Enterprise Agreement.

Fair Work Commission

As you may know, Wilmar recently lodged an application to suspend or terminate our members' industrial action. Deputy President Dobson heard the matter over three days and issued an order to suspend industrial action for six weeks.

On Tuesday, 2nd July 2024, Wilmar requested to meet with us via Microsoft Teams, expressing their readiness to explore the gap now that the Fair Work Commission has ordered the six-week suspension. However, we lodged an appeal with the Fair Work Commission, citing what our legal team believe to be issues of credibility in Wilmar's evidence. Despite their initial willingness to meet, Wilmar's Senior IR Manager later stated they were not interested in meeting until the appeal process is complete. This inconsistency suggests that Wilmar was trying to leverage the Commission's decision against our members to push for a substandard agreement. Now, with an appeal looming, they are unwilling to meet. Instead, Wilmar has requested to meet next Tuesday, knowing that the SBU is unavailable.

The appeal will be heard by a Full Bench of the Fair Work Commission, and the outcome remains uncertain.

Milling Operations

We will be transparent about all mill stoppages reported by our members to demonstrate that the significant economic impact to communities and farmers is due to Wilmar's poor management strategies and ideologies, not our industrial actions.

For example, in the last 24 hours:

Inkerman Mill: While crushing has begun, there have been several breakdowns and delays caused by poor maintenance from inexperienced contractors and a lack of functioning locomotives and bins. Skilled tradespeople and labourers are leaving the industry for slightly higher pay elsewhere, leading to these issues.

Kalamia Mill: Crushing has begun, but there have been multiple stoppages due to a lack of locomotive crews. Wilmar's substandard wages fail to attract workers, resulting in significant gaps in their rostering. Reports indicate these stops last between 4-6 hours each time. Wilmar's attempt to mitigate the impact by using untrained employees from other sites is inadequate and frankly unsafe; with little to no knowledge of the track network at other sites, it's only a matter of time before there is a delay due to a derailment.

Plane Creek Mill: Crushing started but suffered a stop within minutes, followed by separate breakdowns.

Continual Impacts

On Tuesday, 2nd July 2024, at 10:00 AM, a 24-hour overview showed that the total performance of all 11 milling trains was at 23.6% crushing operation. Although our planned one-hour stop on 2nd July was suspended, similar impacts occurred without industrial action. Wilmar continues to blame industrial action for these issues, but we believe poor management and low wages are the cause. Agreeing to our reasonable claims won't fix everything immediately, but it will allow Wilmar to manage their sites more effectively and attract and retain experienced workers.

Where to Now

We will continue to negotiate in good faith as prescribed by Section 228 of the Fair Work Act 2009. Once the appeal is determined we will provide another update.

Kind regards,
Jim Wilson
Northern District Secretary
Queensland & NT

Kind regards,

Travis Phillips
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Queensland & NT
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