



What needs to change

A MEAA guide to the Change The Rules campaign

We need to change the rules so that workers have more secure jobs and better pay.

Many MEAA members work as freelancers in jobs that have little security, variable pay, and few standard entitlements.

Others are unable to progress from casual to permanent employment, or are unable to bargain freely and fairly to improve their pay and conditions, and wages have flatlined.

Australia's workplace rules work for big business, but are failing workers.

Change the Rules is a national campaign by the union movement to turn this around.

We need good, secure jobs

For many of us, our jobs are a cycle of casual work, sham contracts, the gig economy and labour hire.

We don't have basic rights like paid leave or protection against unfair dismissal, and often don't know how much work or pay we will get.

This makes it hard to spend regular time with our family, go on holidays or care for our loved ones.

Growing numbers of our media colleagues are employed in insecure or freelance employment; many work as casuals or on a series of rolling contracts, which in many cases are considered to be "sham contracts".

It's also hard to find a secure job in the entertainment industry. For technicians and crew working in theatre or screen, casual employment is almost always the norm.

Security in these predominantly freelance industries comes from winning strong conditions for the whole industry. We need the right to collectively bargain as an industry. Industry-wide collective agreements provide stability and certainty from job to job. Collectively bargaining as an industry also gives us the opportunity to improve our working lives.

Find out more at:

meaa.org/campaigns/change-the-rules

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We should all have equal rights at work

Whatever your job, it is only fair that you should have the same access to basic rights – a fair wage, fair conditions of engagement and the ability to negotiate collectively.

But the “gig economy” has created two classes of workers: those with rights and those without them.

MEAA Equity members have successfully unionised and organised to negotiate industry-wide agreements in the theatre and screen sectors that provide basic market rates and conditions.

But that right has not been forthcoming for other freelance workers. Freelance workers in theatre, screen and entertainment venues work for many different employers throughout the year – one job

may last a couple of months but others just a couple of weeks or even days.

Media companies and employers in the screen, theatre and entertainment sectors have refused to sit down at the bargaining table and negotiate employment terms with us as a collective because the current broken industrial relation laws allow them to do so.

That’s why it’s time to change the rules – to use our strength as union members to campaign for guaranteed minimum conditions. As freelance workers we should all have the same rights that those in fixed employment have to collectively bargain and advance our claims.

Australia needs a pay rise

We deserve our fair share: wages that keep up with productivity increases and the growth in profits, even in the financially-challenged media sector.

MEAA members have fought hard to maintain living standards in our collective agreements, but workers in workplaces without a strong union culture are seeing their wages flat-line because the law doesn’t require sufficient pay increases, and our laws are not balancing out the power of employers.

Freelance journalism rates have stagnated for the past 15 years because we are not able to organise and take collective action to improve rates of pay as

our salaried colleagues legally do.

It’s the same story in screen: the minimum pay increases in our collective agreements have not reached the pockets of screen members due to the minimum rates being so far below what creative and crew are actually paid.

We need the ability to increase minimum rates across the industry. Winning the right to genuine industry-wide bargaining would change the game – and help build a strong MEAA membership who could then take action to reverse the downward trend in wages and conditions.

Every worker has the right to be treated decently and fairly in the workplace

In a rapidly-evolving economy, workers should have a right to be consulted about changes in their workplace. This is no more so than in the media industry, which has gone through a revolution over the past two decades due to digital technology.

Executives who are disconnected from us or believe they are only accountable to shareholders are

making decisions without first hearing what we have to say. This leaves us unable to plan for our future and the uncertainty in our working lives can cause major problems in our personal lives.

We must have a say about the changes that impact us, big and small, and that say must be taken into account before decisions are made.

Free and fair bargaining

The rules are stacked against us in bargaining. There are strict rules about what's allowed in agreements and who can be covered and employers can now use the "nuclear option" of terminating existing agreements to effectively blackmail workers into accepting inferior pay and conditions or be thrown back onto even lower award rates.

Collective bargaining is only allowed at the enterprise or workplace level and workers are prevented from bargaining across an industry even when this is what's needed to stop rogue employers from gaining an unfair advantage by underpaying workers.

The only bargaining that allows industrial action is when we are seeking an agreement with a single employer. This does not work for freelancers in

industries such as screen, theatre and entertainment where you may have multiple employers throughout the year and one job may only last for a couple of weeks.

We need to get rid of the complex web of rules and regulations that give too much power to employers in bargaining. We should be able to bargain collectively and reach a negotiated agreement with employers on an industry-basis without restrictions.

The rules need to change to ensure bargaining is free and fair, that workers' representatives must be involved in all collective agreements, and the independent umpire has the power to resolve long-running disputes.



Delivering equal pay

More women are working than ever, but are still not paid as well as men.

In the media, the gender gap is 22.2% in broadcasting and 23.3% in print – in both cases, far above the national average of 15.6%.

Not only are women paid less, but they are also

retiring on average with 47% less superannuation than men, and struggle in retirement.

Pay equity must be central in the bargaining framework and award review processes and women's work must be valued as equal to that of men.

Caring matters – and should be valued

At some stage in our working lives, most of us need some time to care for children, a sick relative, or an elderly parent. But we can't access part-time or reduced hours to do this – bosses can simply say no.

When the cost of childcare, or caring for elderly or sick relatives, becomes too high, some of us feel like we have to quit.

Nobody should have to choose between their job and their family.

We can change the rules so we have the right to part-time or reduced hours and the right to return when our caring responsibilities have reduced or ended. And freelancers must be able to accrue carers' leave as they change employers.

Paid family and domestic violence leave

Australia has a crisis of family and domestic violence – and it overwhelmingly affects women.

To leave a violent relationship and recover from the trauma you need economic independence.

Paid leave provides that economic security to leave a violent relationship.

Where MEAA has strong membership, we have

successfully negotiated paid domestic violence leave into agreements. But still many, many workers have no such support.

We need to change the national employment standards to include 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave for all workers as a universal right.

