

# Employment Department's wage offer 'trounced'

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Public Service Minister Eric Abetz has warned there will be consequences after bureaucrats in his department rejected the government's wage policy in a landslide vote on Tuesday.

Nearly 1500 Employment Department bureaucrats cast ballots on a wage offer of less than 0.5 per cent a year, with cuts to conditions and entitlements, with 1419 of the workers rejecting the deal and just 77 voting to accept.

The vote was the first time an offer formulated under the government's tough bargaining policy had been put to to public servants and the trouncing at Employment, announced on Tuesday afternoon, will be noted with interest by management and staff at other departments and agencies.

Enterprise bargaining talks across the 160,000-strong public service are slowed or stalled as departmental bosses struggle to come up with deals that are tough enough to satisfy the bargaining framework imposed by the Abbott government.

Workers at the departments of Human Services and Veterans Affairs have already voted for industrial action in an attempt to force their employers to the bargaining table.

There is growing restlessness at the Australian Taxation Office and the Defence Department after more than 40,000 public servants working at the large agencies realised they would not even get a pay offer this year.

In the wake of the vote at Employment on Tuesday, Senator Abetz said departmental staff voting no to an offer would not result in more generous terms being offered.

"Government employees and unions should be under no illusions about the consequences of voting no to new EBAs (enterprise bargaining agreements) under the government's bargaining framework," he said.

"The government has made it clear that voting no will not mean that departments will have any capacity to make more generous offers, as the framework will not be changing."

But the Community and Public Sector Union, which has about one-third of Employment staff on its books, said the ballot result sent a clear message to the Minister.

"The message from staff to the Minister is crystal clear: don't cut our conditions and real wages," CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said.

"If Minister Abetz's own staff won't swallow such a terrible deal, then how can he expect the rest of the public service to do so?"

A departmental spokesman said his bosses were disappointed at the outcome and that the offer was realistic and affordable.

"The department is disappointed with the ballot result," the spokesman said. "We considered the proposed enterprise agreement was a realistic and affordable offer to employees.

"We cannot make commitments which are not offset by savings.

"We will continue to work within the parameters of the government's bargaining policy and our internal operating budget."

Employment would have to begin picking up the pieces in the new year, the spokesman said.

"The department will now take time to consider the outcome, ahead of re-commencing bargaining meetings in the new year," he said.

"The department appreciates the importance of settling a new enterprise agreement, given there will be no backdated pay increases."