

NAB workers win over taxi chits

Susannah Moran

Thinking of cutting out taxi vouchers to cut costs? Think again

Workers at National Australia Bank have won the first round in a court battle to force the bank to reinstate a policy of supplying taxi vouchers to people who work late.

The Finance Sector Union brought an action on behalf of hundreds of workers at NAB's call centre in the western Sydney suburb of Rhodes and in the outer eastern suburb of Knox in Melbourne, which are not well serviced by public transport.

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission heard that just over a week ago, NAB had stopped subsidising travel

for staff who worked after 8pm, including taxi vouchers, paid parking and mileage allowances.

The FSU argued that the dispute related to an occupational health and safety and work-life balance issue. It said NAB had a duty of care to its staff. Because of the late finishing time, employees' safety would be compromised without the travel assistance.

It also said that it would take employees a lot longer to get home if they had to rely on public transport and would interfere with their time available for other pursuits.

NAB argued that the commission did not have the jurisdiction to hear the dispute because the matter did not relate to an issue that was

part of its enterprise agreement.

The commission said in a written judgement: "The argument put by NAB is straightforward. It submits that the real issue is not occupational health and safety or work-life balance

"NAB stopped subsidising staff travel after 8pm."

but a claim for the retention of the policy in relation to travel assistance."

While not commenting on the strength of the arguments, the commission ruled that it did have jurisdiction to hear the matter.

It ruled, however, that it had

no jurisdiction over parking or mileage allowances for those people who drove to work.

"It constitutes, perhaps, a serious additional cost impact on the employee but it does not impact upon their occupational health and safety," the commission said.

When NAB moved 200 staff to the new call centre to Rhodes in May last year, chief executive Ahmed Fahour said that he hoped 540 staff would be employed there by this year and that "our investment in the Rhodes contact centre... is also consistent with our strategy to attract and retain quality people who put customers first."

The parties are to return to the commission later this week.

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