

# AEU NT Member Bulletin 7/2020

1 May 2020

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## **May Day greetings from the President**

The May Day weekend is normally a big deal on the calendar of the union movement and for the AEU NT in particular. In normal times, today we would be welcoming delegates from sub-branches all over the Territory to Darwin for our annual Conference.

Like so many other events, our Conference has been postponed this year – we are still planning to hold it later in the year.

Yesterday you will have [heard the Chief Minister make some welcome remarks about a “road map” for the Territory](#) that shows life can begin to return to normal. This is good news for everyone, although there is still very much a long road ahead, especially with the NT borders remaining effectively sealed until further notice. I’m sure most of you will need no encouragement from me, but this year more than ever, I am encouraging members to use this long weekend as a chance to really relax, maybe put your feet up or do whatever it is you like to do to unwind.

I know the school holiday period was a stressful time, as was the period that preceded it, with huge efforts launched to prepare for online, distance and mixed mode curriculum delivery. It has been an extraordinarily stressful time, but you took it in your stride and got the job done.

In unparalleled circumstances, teachers, principals and support staff kept schools open and running and maintained a sense of normality for the young people you teach and care for. To acknowledge your dedication and professionalism, the AEU NT took out a full page ad in today’s NT News.

I would also like to acknowledge the role played by office-based staff in supporting schools, including the senior officers of the Department, who have also worked long hours in difficult times to manage this crisis. Our new Chief Executive, Karen Weston, has only just come on board but has demonstrated, in my opinion, that she is very serious about the welfare of staff. Throughout this crisis she and the DoE senior leadership have consulted regularly with the AEU NT and we see no reason why those arrangements should not continue. The Commissioner for Public Employment, Vicki Telfer, has also shown compassion and pragmatism in supporting new arrangements in schools we have not utilised before, such as working from home provisions for vulnerable staff.

Thankfully, the number of cases of COVID-19 in the Territory are very low, however it is still a stressful time for educators, especially older and more vulnerable staff, because social distancing measures are not possible to enforce in a school setting with often crowded staffrooms and up to 27 students in a classroom. Our focus right now as a union is the wellbeing and welfare of members, of whom so much is still being asked. For many remote staff, the challenges are particularly acute, with restrictions enforced under the Biosecurity Act meaning teaching staff still do not know when it will be possible to leave communities, although yesterday’s announcement by the Chief Minister suggest there is a light at the end of the tunnel. In good times and bad, the AEU will continue with our core business of supporting members – ensuring your safety at work and protecting your employment conditions.

And even when circumstances keep us physically apart, our commitment to collective action and unionism means we are united in spirit. Happy May Day and enjoy the long weekend.

*Jarvis Ryan*

### **NT Roadmap – what does it mean for schools and remote areas?**

The office has already fielded queries on what the NT's new road map means for school operations. As the Chief Executive announced yesterday, the current operating guidelines for schools will remain in place for now. That means things like excursions and sporting activities will remain on hold for now.

The road map contained an important date for remote staff – Thursday 18 June. This is the day that restrictions being enforced under the Biosecurity Act are due to expire. Restrictions on movement for those living within biosecurity zones may be lifted as of this date, subject to the NT Government reaching agreement with the Federal Government, land councils and communities.

The AEU NT will continue to push very strongly for remote members to be able to leave remote communities during the mid-year break with the opportunity for a reprieve in Darwin, Alice Springs or other NT towns.

### **Teacher Permanency Project extended**

The classroom teacher permanency project has been extended until at least October 2021 under the same process as before. Contract teachers who have completed at least 12 months of continuous service, done their probation and satisfy performance requirements are eligible for conversion to permanent, subject to a school having capacity and the use of a closed merit process as appropriate. Members who wish to be considered should engage your principal about capacity and contact the office for advice on the process as required.

The AEU NT has also discussed with the Department and the Minister the need for other avenues for teachers to gain permanency, as the current project has not reduced the ratio of teachers on contract. In our view it is still far too high – up to one in five teachers are on contract in a position that is notionally vacant. This issue will remain a priority area for us.

### **Principal employment review process resumes**

The President attended a meeting of the principal employment review advisory group this week. The group met for the first time in more than six weeks, resuming after a busy period due to COVID-19. Discussions are still occurring on a “without prejudice” basis, meaning that parties involved have agreed not to divulge a great deal of information to principals at this stage. However, we can report that negotiations are proceeding on a good faith basis, with genuine intent by all involved to move this project along and create a more transparent and fair employment classification structure for principals. [Terms of reference have been agreed](#). The group will meet again next week and have agreed that communication and consultation with principals must take place soon. The AEU will hold meetings with principal members in coming weeks.

### **RATE restored**

A very welcome development this week was the [Minister for Education's decision to restore the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Program \(RATE\) on a trial basis in 2021](#) in partnership with CDU and BIITE. RATE played a crucial role in the 1980s and 1990s in training hundreds of local Indigenous teachers, and its restoration is something our union, remote communities and schools have been crying out for. We look forward to learning more about the scope of the trial.

**Please let us know ASAP if your workplace, contact details or income have changed**

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