

Rocla workers strike as part of pay dispute

Workers in Emu Plains downed tools twice on Wednesday as part of ongoing pay negotiations with Rocla.

Joel Erickson, Penrith Press



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Members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) have been negotiating a pay-rise with Rocla since May, and are currently one per cent apart.

Rocla, a concrete company on Old Bathurst Rd that builds a number of structures used for construction, is offering a two per cent per year rise, while the AWU is looking for at least three per cent.

AWU branch organiser Dom James said the company had “barely budged” in almost six months.

“We’ve had a number of unproductive meetings since May,” he said.

“They started at 1.5 per cent initially, and that’s slowly risen to two over a period of time.

“Our guys countered with three, and the reason for that is the company has given us nothing to justify a wage increase of only two per cent, which is beneath a number of key indicators like wage-price index and the Consumer Price Index.”

But Rocla argued it had offered a “fair amount” during negotiations.

“Rocla has been negotiating in good faith with AWU for several weeks now,” a Rocla spokeswoman said.

“We are disappointed that these negotiations have stalled, and industrial action is being taken.

“We have offered a fair pay increase which is in line with inflation and competitive within our industry. We welcome AWU back to negotiations.”



Rocla workers participate in similar industrial action in Emu Plains back in 2003. Picture: Armen Deushian.

AWU lead campaigns organiser, Michael Kerley, said he was disappointed in Rocla’s negotiating tactics.

“This seems to be an approach Rocla is using across the country,” he said.

“We’ve had a long and productive relationship with the company here, and it’s been a decade since our members have had to take any form of action at this site.

“At this stage, we’d describe Rocla as ‘not negotiating in good faith’.

“We’ve asked Rocla to give us examples of why they can’t afford anything extra, and all we’re told is they have a two per cent wage policy across Australia.

“We see that as a slap in the face to our members, and if our members were to accept a substandard wage increase, it would outprice other members we have in the industry.” Barry James has worked at Rocla for nearly 28 years and serves as the union delegate on site.

“There was a change in senior management where we were merged with another Fletcher Building company called Iplex, and they replaced all the Rocla management,” he said.

“We’ve always had a good working relationship with Rocla, but now I don’t know.”

Dom James said 86 per cent of members endorsed the industrial action.

“Rocla has forced our members into this response, and if there isn’t a change from management, I dare say there’ll be more to follow,” he said.

“We can’t have a situation where a big employer in the community is having a wage increase that puts them on the brink of being below cost-of-living increases.

“It’s tight for a lot of families, and these guys have chosen to take industrial action at the detriment of their wages.

“It speaks volumes, and hopefully Rocla listens to that and gives them something reasonable to consider.”