

Wednesday, May 4 2011

Report of meeting between Media Alliance and Fairfax management

Alliance representatives met representatives of Fairfax Media this morning to discuss the company's plans to outsource its newspaper production to Pagemasters. Fairfax agreed to a joint examination between management and a group of senior subeditors to discuss possible internal alternatives to outsourcing subediting work.

The company has assured the Alliance that the matters announced yesterday were "a proposal" and that no contracts have been signed with Pagemasters.

An internal alternative could include some form of subediting hub in Sydney and Melbourne. This would result in job losses, but would reduce the number of jobs lost on Fairfax metropolitan mastheads.

It would also keep within the company the necessary creative synergies between the writing and reporting function on the one hand and the editing and subediting function on the other.

The company stressed that the changes in editorial are part of a company-wide plan to cut about 300 jobs. As a result of outsourcing to Pagemasters, about 90 jobs would be lost on the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. The savings they are hoping to make in subediting costs by outsourcing to Pagemasters would be reinvested in editorial through extra reporters, writers, trainees and training.

The company also said that outsourcing was more efficient when it involved work going to a company whose core competency was production. They claimed this meant more efficiencies and greater productivity.

The Alliance responded that specialised production skills were what subeditors did – and that similar outcomes should be possible through internal restructuring.

The company agreed to a proposal that a group of senior subeditors should meet with editorial management on Thursday, May 5 and Friday, May 6 – and over the weekend, if necessary – to test these assumptions and to examine alternatives.



On redundancies: Fairfax management said that it was committed to the voluntary redundancy procedures as laid out in the collective agreement, which require calling for volunteers across the business units (ie: Sydney Morning Herald and The Age).

The company also reiterated the undertaking made to staff at the Canberra Times that at this stage, Canberra Times subbing will not be outsourced and that there will be no redundancies.

Resolution of staff

This meeting condemns the company's plans to outsource its subediting work to Pagemasters and its failure to consult staff on the issue.

We note the company has agreed to engage in talks to examine whether there is an option to continue this work in house and we endorse representatives of the house committee to participate in those talks.

We note the company has agreed to abide by the redundancy provisions of the collective agreement and will call for volunteers across the relevant group. We reiterate our continued opposition to any threat of compulsory redundancies.

We resolve to reconvene next week to discuss the outcome of those talks.



Authorised by Christopher Warren, Federal Secretary

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