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In a move that signals a new era for the union movement, the Southern Local Government Officers’ Union (SLGOU) and the PSA will officially merge on 1 April 2015. Editor Shelly Biswell spoke to SLGOU President Paul Cottam about what the merger means for our members and for union representation within local government and the wider public service.

**What do you see as the main benefits of this merger?**
I think everyone in the union movement understands the importance of working together – and that’s what this merger is all about. It joins together two unions that already had good track records in collective bargaining and a strong public service ethos. Together, I think all of our members will see benefits in terms of advocacy and support.

**Can you discuss some of the specific strengths SLGOU members will bring to the PSA?**
By the numbers SLGOU’s members will increase the number of PSA members who work in local government by about 25 per cent – from 6000 to 8000. It’s a significant increase and means that members in local government will make up more than 10 per cent of the total PSA membership. The merger should ensure we have an even stronger voice for quality services and jobs in local government.

Our members will also bring a regional perspective and will add to the national conversation about the increased pressures that many local authorities are facing. Specifically, many of our members are in Christchurch and are uniquely placed to speak to issues around the recovery and rebuild.

**Has the merger been welcomed by SLGOU members?**
Yes. The vast majority of our members voted for the merger. It’s a decision our membership actively debated and discussed before taking the vote, so I think the whole executive feels very confident in the outcome.

In some ways, the merger process has felt like a natural progression because of the many common goals the two unions share. Our members are looking forward to continuing to contribute to those goals and receiving the support that a national union can provide.

**Do you have any suggestions for the PSA and its current members?**
It will be crucial for the PSA to continue to communicate regularly with our members through the transition – not just about the logistics, but also about what it means to be a PSA member and how members can engage. It’s important that our members see that they are an important part of the PSA’s future.

**How has the transition been to date?**
It has been a positive experience so far. SLGOU’s liaison committees, joint council and staff have really stepped up to make the transition go smoothly. We have also seen great engagement from our members. The team at the PSA have also been extremely helpful. I would like to particularly thank PSA President Mike Tana who gave SLGOU members such a warm welcome at the 2014 PSA congress. I also want to acknowledge PSA staff, especially Glenn Barclay and Warwick Jones who took the time to meet with our executive and members to work through our questions and concerns. And a special thanks needs to go to SLGOU secretary Angela Watson for her energy and hard work throughout the process.

A union’s success is based on its members. I am really proud of what we have accomplished through SLGOU over the years and look forward to working alongside PSA members across the country to work together for a better future for all of our members.
More than a job

Kia ora koutou,

It’s going to be a busy year for the PSA. More than half of our members are going to be in collective bargaining in 2015-2016, which means as an organisation, we need to be at the top of our game.

Collective bargaining offers our members the chance to be involved in conversations and decisions that will affect their day-to-day work life, from pay rates, to professional development opportunities, to addressing issues like bullying. And it makes a difference.

As NZCTU secretary Sam Huggard says in his interview with Working Life (page 23), “we know that last year 98 per cent of people who bargained collectively got a pay rise, but only 48 per cent of workers who had to go it alone on an individual agreement got a raise”.

Proof that working together truly makes it better for everyone. If your organisation is entering collective bargaining, make sure you get involved to ensure that the value you give to your organisation is recognised by your employer. Attend PSA meetings and other organised events, support your delegates, and discuss the importance of the bargaining process with your colleagues. If your organisation isn’t involved in collective bargaining right now, you still have an important role to play in supporting members in organisations that are. After all, your turn may be next.

On a different topic, this summer I took the opportunity to spend some extra time with my loved ones. Longer, warmer days meant more time playing with the kids after work and sitting outside after dinner with my partner. It reminded me just how important work-life balance is. It’s no surprise that when I hit that sweet spot with my time I am happier at my work and better at being a dad, partner and friend.

But getting the balance right is difficult. Sometimes a project at work requires extra hours outside work or one of my children gets sick and my wife and I need to negotiate time away from the office. In other words, my real life sometimes gets in the way of my ideal life.

I know the same is true for many of our members and it’s nice to have understanding management that supports flexible arrangements.

We know there is significant room for improvement in the area, especially for women workers. As Victoria University of Wellington researchers discuss in their analysis of our 2013 Workplace Dynamics in New Zealand Public Services survey (pages 16-17), of the female public servants who responded to the survey just over 70 per cent “strongly disagree” that their work hours are determined entirely by themselves, compared with just under 30 per cent of men. It’s something that needs to be addressed within workplaces and another area where high numbers in the union can help change work cultures that don’t support the whole worker.

To give this a personal perspective, I ask you to take time to focus on yourselves over 2015. Many of you give much to your community, your peers, your work and the PSA, with little thought of yourselves or the impact of what you do has on your family.

So stand up and fight the good fight as proud public servants, but most of all, keep yourselves safe, for your kids, for your partners, for your parents, for your closest friends. The greatest gift you can give and joy is to be there for those who love you.

(In loving memory of Celia Lashlie, one of New Zealand’s most selfless and truly inspirational women, who has made a difference in the lives of many New Zealanders.)

Kia kaha

Mike Tana
PSA president

MyPSA – your online connection

Have you seen the new PSA website yet? Log in to MyPSA with your membership number (on your membership card and in the subject line of emails we send you) and you can:

• Update your details
• Get involved in PSA networks
• Check out the latest news for your workplace, sector and region
• Find out who your delegate is and contact them
• And more coming soon!
International outlook

The International Labour Union published its World Employment Social Outlook Trends 2015 in January.

The report states that the world economy is growing at rates well below the trends that preceded the onset of the global crisis in 2008. Over 201 million people were unemployed in 2014 around the world, over 31 million more than before the start of the global crisis. And, global unemployment is expected to increase by three million in 2015 and by a further eight million in the following four years.

The Government is extending the length of paid parental leave to 18 weeks, up from 14 weeks. The change will happen in two steps:

- Step 1: As of 1 April 2015 paid parental leave will go up to 16 weeks.
- Step 2: As of 1 April 2016 paid parental leave will go up to 18 weeks.

New policy for members who leave employment

The PSA executive board has agreed on a new policy that authorises the secretariat to waive the obligation of any member who leaves employment to pay subscription fees for a period of up to three months from the last date of their employment. These members would have all the rights of a financial member for this period. The new policy means that all members who leave their jobs will stay as full members for three months.

The aim is to enable the PSA to maintain connections with those members who leave their employment, provide them with support should it be needed and ensure that they remain members when they start a new job.

The policy does not apply to members who resign from the PSA.

60,000 members strong

Congratulations to Sarah Reilly whose name was drawn in a recruitment competition the PSA held at the beginning of the year. Sarah is a physiotherapist at Capital & Coast DHB. Sarah received a $100 grocery voucher.
Annual members’ meetings
Between April and the end of June a PSA annual members’ meeting (AMM) will be held in your workplace. An important part of this year’s AMMs is that the biennial delegate elections will be held. Our members are the PSA’s lifeblood which is why we try to ensure members have the opportunity to attend at least one workplace meeting every year.
We are currently updating the annual members’ meetings resources for 2015. Your PSA organiser will have the resources for your workplace from late March.

Superannuitants beware
The experience of member Brent Doncliff should be a cautionary tale for our members who have worked in Australia and have money invested in superannuation schemes, such as QSuper, that are not regulated by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA). Under the trans-Tasman superannuation portability scheme, people can transfer their accumulated savings from APRA regulated funds into KiwiSaver, but non-APRA regulated schemes are not covered.
Earlier this year, Brent wanted to move his money from QSuper, the Queensland Government scheme, into KiwiSaver. He quickly found that what should have been a simple transfer between superannuation funds became an exercise in frustration. “I ran into a number of difficulties and delays – something that would not have occurred if all Australian and New Zealand superannuation funds participated in the trans-Tasman portability scheme,” Brent says.
He adds, “What would be nice is to see Australia and New Zealand working together to streamline the transfer process.”
PSA policy advisor Glenn Barclay says the difficulty with transferring between superannuation schemes could have big implications for members who have worked for more than one jurisdiction.
“It’s really important to understand the scheme you are in, as well as have a clear idea about how you will want to access that money during your retirement. The problem is exacerbated when schemes are compulsory as they are in Australia. The issue is complicated, but it would be good if the two governments could facilitate a long-term solution.”

Correction – car registration reductions
The car registration reductions noted in the December 2014 issue of Working Life (Save dollars – page 7) will come into effect from 1 July 2015 (not April as reported).
The ACC vehicle licensing levy is being reduced and a risk rating is being introduced for some vehicles. As a result of these changes, the fee paid to license a vehicle will go down by an average of 41 per cent, depending on the type of vehicle. The registration reduction will automatically apply to cars that are eligible from 1 July. If your vehicle is up for renewal before July, you may choose to use the three or six month renewal options so that you are able to take full advantage of the reduction when it comes into effect.

Nurse Maude collective agreement reached
This past January a bargaining team of two workplace delegates, local PSA organiser Mike Chaney, and national Nurse Maude organiser and bargaining advocate Amy Ross reached an agreement in principle with management at Nurse Maude.
Amy says it’s a first for the home-support provider and was “one of the most positive bargaining experiences” she has been involved with. “The inclusion of clauses such as family violence protection provisions, extra sick leave for union members and a commitment to work together to improve the sector make it clear that Nurse Maude and the PSA are on the same page when it comes to the well-being of staff,” Amy says.
A new qualification-based framework has also been agreed in relation to pay, resulting in a more equitable, transparent and fair pay system.
PSA assistant national secretary Kerry Davies says the agreement was reached in just three days and represents “a good outcome for everyone involved, including the clients Nurse Maude supports”.
The agreement is now being ratified.

Giveaway: The Catch
The PSA has three copies of The Catch: How fishing companies reinvented slavery and plunder the oceans by Michael Field to give away. The Catch was published by Awa Press in 2014. To enter the draw, email your name and postal address to Workinglife@psa.org.nz with the word "Giveaway" in the subject line. Or put your name and address on the back of an envelope and post to Working Life, PO Box 3817, Wellington. The closing date is 15 April. Read the interview with Michael on page 29.

Giveaway winners
The giveaway in the last Working Life was a Pride DVD. Congratulations to the five winners: Tipene Daniels, Ian McClymont, Hayley Proffit, Sean Martin, and KC Tétvano.
Standing up for healthcare professionals

New Zealand registered anaesthetic technician (NZRAT) and PSA union delegate Louise Morgan provides another perspective on the current state of training and pay for health workers.

After reading Katie Chadwick-Smith’s excellent article in the August 2014 edition of Working Life, I felt compelled to write an article about where anaesthetic technicians are now from a PSA union and trade training perspective.

As Katie highlighted, we are highly skilled and valuable members of the operating theatre healthcare team. Health Workforce NZ and the government agree there is a need for and a shortage of NZRATs. There are many reasons for the shortage, including many NZRATs choosing to move into private sector roles, such as medical representatives, due to poor salaries and a lack of ways to advance in the profession.

As part of addressing the current shortage, the Medical Sciences Council has asked our professional body, the New Zealand Anaesthetic Technicians’ Society (NZATS), to develop a trade training plan that identifies ways to train NZRATs more efficiently so they are able to move into district health board (DHB) roles more quickly. Last year NZATS hosted information and exchange meetings about the training plan around the country. PSA delegates and local area representatives were present at many of these meetings. The training plan is in the last stages of development and when finalised may have a significant impact on training requirements, certification, hiring practices and pay scales.

Beyond potential NZRAT training changes, this year a 12-month postgraduate programme for qualified nursing staff has been introduced that leads to a Certificate of Proficiency Registered Nurse Assistant to the Anaesthetist (RNAA). Nurses who earn this certificate will not sit NZATS national examinations and will not be known as anaesthetic technicians, but in the long term they may compete for anaesthetic technician roles within DHBs.

In other words, we are at an important crossroads with NZRATs in New Zealand where the voice of the PSA is crucial. The union needs to consider how the proposed training changes will impact on the current workforce in terms of salary, progression and conditions of employment. The question for those of us in the field is how will we ensure our roles are classed as fair and secure in the future in our trade group with the multi-tier profession that has been introduced with the RNAA and potential changes to our profession’s training? How will we ensure we have the opportunity for career development and advancement, particularly since we do not have the same educational entitlements to further training as our nursing colleagues have? And how do we, as a trade group, achieve a diverse and flexible career pathway in the future when the playing field seems to be increasingly uneven?

These are not easy issues to address, but they must be considered as we enter into bargaining later this year.

Editor’s note: As part of the terms of settlement of the 2014 Allied Health and Technical Multi-Employer Collective Agreement, it was agreed that specific issues for a number of allied health professions (including NZRATs) would be progressed. A national forum has been established that will meet four times a year (the first meeting was held in February). Representation on the forum will include chief operating officers, directors of allied health, district health board shared services, and general managers of human resources. Regional meetings are also being organised with local directors of allied health and the PSA to work through local issues.

Mentoring programme planned

Many PSA Youth (PSAY) members have expressed an interest in being mentored by an experienced PSA delegate or other union leader, or being trained to become a mentor for another member.

Delegates interested in serving as mentors are invited to express an interest in attending a half-day mentor training. Based on the response, training is being planned for April and May.

PSAY members interested in being mentored will be added to a waiting list and paired up with a mentor in their region as trained mentors become available.

The mentoring programme is expected to officially kick off in June.
Wellington councils consider amalgamation

First it was Auckland, now it may be Wellington’s turn. The region is looking at the possibility of a single council to replace the four district councils, the four city councils and the regional council. This would be a “unitary authority” which would combine the functions and powers of all levels of local government into one new local authority – the Greater Wellington Council. The new council would have 21 councillors representing eight wards, each of which would have a directly elected local board. There would also be a mayor elected by voters across the region.

While there are some similarities there are a number of differences between the Wellington and Auckland situations. Most importantly the decision to amalgamate the Auckland councils was made by the government who developed their own model and imposed it through legislation. The current proposal was developed by the Local Government Commission following applications from Greater Wellington Regional Council and the Wairarapa councils who wanted a separate unitary authority for their district. It is subject to submissions and, if a referendum is called for, a vote of all eligible residents within the proposed councils’ boundaries.

The PSA is making a submission to the Local Government Commission and we have been gathering views of members in all the affected councils. They have a number of concerns about what it will mean for their localities, their residents and the services they receive. They are also concerned about the likelihood that more services in areas such as parks, drainage and recreation, will be contracted out. The submission will address these issues, as well as issues about the transition to the new council should the amalgamation go ahead.

We have learned a lot from the Auckland amalgamation, where the PSA had a central role in the move from the old to the new council. We need to be assured that services will be maintained, that there will be quality jobs, fair pay and conditions and secure jobs, and the PSA has to be around the table. Anything less will result in problems for the new council and its staff.

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It’s a bargain

This year over half of our members will be in organisations that are involved with collective bargaining.

Depending on the size of the organisation and the nature of the issues to be addressed, bargaining can take from a week, as Nurse Maude recently illustrated (see page 7) to a couple of years (there are a few that have lasted longer, but fortunately they are the exception).

Bargaining is our core work so we put a lot of emphasis on systems and support. While many of the processes are streamlined, assistant secretary Kerry Davies says that it’s important to recognise that each bargaining situation will be different.

“Good systems are paramount, but we also know there’s not a cookie-cutter approach. For example, collective bargaining in an office situation where there may be hundreds of members will be completely different than collective bargaining for people who may not even go into the same place of work, such as community support workers,” she says.

And that’s where organisers play such a vital role.

“Organisers work with delegates throughout the process, from pre-bargaining, to bargaining, to ratification. They have a vast understanding of what works in different situations and can be helpful in providing guidance to delegates and members.”

Assistant secretary Basil Prestidge says bargaining is an important mechanism the PSA uses to work for a ‘better working life’ for our members.

“That means when we go into bargaining we are wanting to have genuine discussions of matters of importance to members, as well as taking into account what is good for the organisation.

“What’s crucial to the PSA as an organisation is ensuring that each of our members is heard and feels valued through the process. Representation through the bargaining team is an important part of that, but it also means having meaningful discussions with the wider membership throughout the process.”

For example, district health boards (DHBs) will be involved in collective bargaining this year both with the PSA and with the New Zealand Nurses Organisation.

Organiser Sue McCullough says the national bargaining teams for DHBs need to be aware of what’s happening in the wider landscape.

“While we are negotiating with DHBs, the funding issue actually resides with the government through the Ministry of Health. In this type of collective bargaining it’s imperative to have strong member support so that we’re able to influence funding decisions as well,” she says.

Behind-the-scenes
Organisers help delegates with work that is required through the process.

“We provide kits to delegates to guide them through the full process and check in on a regular basis to provide support,” says organiser Melinda Derbidge. “Our goal is to help delegates with navigating the process so they can focus on the issues and communicating with members.”

Good communications, good results
Communication with members is key throughout the process which is why a communications plan is such an essential part of the pre-bargaining work.

“Pre-bargaining sets the stage for what issues will be addressed through bargaining. That usually includes sending out emails requesting input and holding one or more member meetings so that issues can be discussed and, if agreed to, endorsed,” organiser Lenka Tolich Ryall says.

Statistics New Zealand delegates who were involved in collective bargaining in 2014. From left: Ros Denton, Allan Thompson, Jenny Devereux, Scott Trainor, and Nathan McCluskey.
Teamwork
During the bargaining stage, the bargaining team will be representing the PSA members within the organisation. Having an organiser (who steps into the role of advocate through this stage) brings the direct support of the PSA to the bargaining table.

“We have found the team approach to be the most effective,” Kerry says.

During the bargaining stage, the bargaining team, which includes delegates and the organiser/advocate, will report back to members following each session.

Ratification is the final stage in the process. For bargaining teams it can require both tenacity and attention to detail.

“Part of the reason we have split the process into three distinct stages,” says Basil, “is that each requires a different type of focus.

“In pre-bargaining emphasis might be on recruitment and getting good systems in place, in bargaining it’s clearly stating the issues raised by members and advocating on their behalf, and in the final stage it’s ensuring we have an outcome that our members are satisfied with. After all, you don’t want to slip when you are that close to the summit.”

How can you participate if your organisation is involved in collective bargaining?
• Take every opportunity you can to provide input. This is your chance to have your say on the issues that matter to you.
• Support the bargaining team – after all they are representing your interests. That means attending meetings, responding to requests, and chipping in where you can. “Even little things like setting up chairs for meetings or posting notices can really mean a lot to the bargaining team,” says Lenka.
• Look for ways to build PSA membership in your organisation – high union member numbers can have a positive influence on collective bargaining and general employment discussions within the workplace.

What about if your organisation is not involved in collective bargaining, but you still want to help?
Even if your organisation is not going through collective bargaining there are often ways you can support other members.
• Stay up to date on collective bargaining occurring in your region and sector. Take time to go along to industrial actions when the wider PSA membership is involved.
• Talk with members within your own organisation to see if there are ways you can help as a group.

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Advocating for pay equity

Pay equity advocates
Already about 160 PSA members have signed up to become pay equity advocates. Pay equity campaign organiser Gabriel Brettkelly says the initial response has been extremely positive.

“We have both women and men signing up as advocates which really underscores the point that inequality affects us all,” she says.

Gabriel says there is still an important education job to be done on closing the gender pay gap with many people assuming it’s not a problem in New Zealand.

“In many places of work it’s an embedded issue that will require both awareness and a real commitment to change,” Gabriel says.

“And that’s where our pay equity advocates come in. Already they are doing some very creative things to raise awareness about our Worth 100% campaign. For example, one of our advocates has created a pay equity quiz for their staff notice board.”

In March, Gabriel will pilot a two-hour education module for pay equity advocates within the PSA education team. She then plans to introduce it to the women’s network committee. Once finalised, both women’s network committee members and education organisers will be able to offer the module in workplaces around the country.

Interested in becoming a PSA pay equity advocate? Click the Join Campaign button on the pay equity webpage: www.psa.org.nz/payequity.

Important victory for equal pay
The saying goes that “good things take time”, but for aged-care worker Kristine Bartlett and many other women workers in women-dominated occupations, such as community support work, time must sometimes seem like an eternity.

Even after 20 years with aged-care provider Terranova Homes and Care Ltd, Kristine earned just $14.46 an hour. In 2013 Kristine and the Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) lodged a claim for a breach of the Equal Pay Act 1972. The case is being decided in two stages with the first stage considering questions of law under the Equal Pay Act and the second stage determining the principles that will set the equal pay rate for Kristine’s job in aged care.

For the first stage, the Employment Court ruled in favour of Kristine, noting that for work done exclusively or predominantly by women, the comparison should be to work done by a hypothetical man in any sector or industry that required the same (or substantially similar), skills, responsibility, service, conditions and degrees of effort.

Terranova appealed and in 2014 the Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal, but recommended that the Employment Court issue principles and guidelines before proceeding further with Kristine Bartlett’s claim.

The Aged Care Association then lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court on 25 November. On 22 December, the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal at this stage, saying that the Employment Court should now assess the rate for the work as per the original decision.

The Supreme Court’s decision means the second stage of the case can now proceed where principles will be determined that will set the equal pay rate for Kristine’s job in aged care, and comparisons with men’s work in other sectors can be made.

Erin Polaczuk, PSA national secretary says, “Supported by the SFWU, Kristine Bartlett has taken on an issue that affects women across many sectors. We hope the Employment Court process continues to produce such positive outcomes and that Kristine and her fellow workers earn equal pay for work of equal value.

“Through our Worth 100% campaign and other pay equity initiatives, the PSA will continue to give this issue the profile it deserves. Our goal is to see this happen by 2020, but for people like Kristine, it really can’t happen soon enough.”

The 2014 Human Resource Capability report showed the gender pay gap in the public service is still at 14.1 per cent.
In the thick of it
Politics and public sector employees – PSA lunchtime series

The discussion continues. ... This year we are again featuring the successful lunchtime seminar series In the thick of it.

In February, we kicked off the 2015 series with Helen Wyn, deputy chief executive – policy, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC). Helen discussed the DPMC-led Policy Project. The project team’s work has included examining the current state of New Zealand’s policy system and working with senior policy leaders from across government to develop and implement a programme of initiatives related to improving quality of policy advice.

To view the video and transcript from Helen’s presentation or any of our 2014 presenters visit www.psa.org.nz/IntheThickofit.

In April, we will host several seminars on the Official Information Act. Visit the PSA website for more information.

In December, Nicola Gaston and Sandra Grey, Victoria University, discussed whether public funding is shutting down the voices of scientists, non-government organisations, and other experts. The video and transcript of their seminar are available on the PSA website.

Does income inequality hurt economic growth?

New OECD research suggests the answer is yes. Analysis in Focus on Inequality and Growth shows that income inequality has a negative and statistically significant impact on medium-term growth.

The researchers looked at how much the GDP growth rate would have increased or decreased over the period 1990 to 2010 had inequality not changed between 1985 and 2005 (they did not use the most recent inequality trends as these will affect future growth patterns).

Their findings? Rising inequality is estimated to have knocked more than 10 percentage points off the growth rate of GDP per capita here in New Zealand, as well as in Mexico; nearly 9 points in the United Kingdom, Finland and Norway; and between 6 and 7 points in the United States, Italy and Sweden. On the other side of the equation, greater equality prior to the global financial crisis helped increase GDP per capita in Spain, France and Ireland.

The researchers found that the biggest factor for the impact of inequality on growth is the gap between lower income households and the rest of the population.

As noted in the report, “The negative effect is not just for the poorest income decile but all of those in the bottom four deciles of the income distribution. These findings imply that policy must not (just) be about tackling poverty, it also needs to be about addressing lower incomes more generally.”

As the researchers note, “Tackling inequality can make our societies fairer and our economies stronger.”

In December, the chief ombudsman announced a review of the Official Information Act 1982 practices in the public sector.

Twelve government agencies have been selected for a formal review, while a further 63 agencies and all 27 ministers’ offices have been asked to complete a two-part survey covering all aspects of OIA practice.

Input from current and former public servants, opposition parties, journalists, academic commentators and other users of the OIA will also be sought. The ombudsman’s office will invite public input to the review which will be announced shortly.

**A systemic issue or isolated incidences?**
The ombudsman’s office has had anecdotal reports that media and others have encountered a variety of approaches to OIA requests, particularly during last year’s election period. During that time, OIA practices came under heightened scrutiny as allegations surfaced that some OIA requests had been stonewalled with at least one of these allegations substantiated through an independent inquiry.

As chief ombudsman Beverley Wakem notes, “Circumvention and delays in the OIA have the potential to erode public confidence in the effective operation of the OIA throughout the core public sector.”

At least some delays seem to be politically motivated with the prime minister acknowledging to the media last year that some official information was held up to the 20-day deadline if “that’s in our best interest to do that”.

National secretary Richard Wagstaff says that anecdotally the PSA has heard of the OIA being used for political purposes through successive governments, but any politicisation of the OIA is unacceptable.

“When ministers use the OIA for their own purposes, it has an untenable impact on the overall culture within the public service. It also means that individual public servants can be put in extremely vulnerable positions in terms of doing the right thing and worrying about their job,” he says.

In discussing the review in December, Beverley Wakem told Radio New Zealand the aim is to assess the quality and integrity of OIA practice across the public sector and to address any issues that are found.

“The review will come forward with, I hope, some key trends, key sins of omission that we can do something about. And thereafter, I propose that the office will then on a regular basis audit performance in these matters against a standard.”

**What’s next?**
The review began in December 2014 with responses to the survey due in the early part of 2015. The review and stakeholder engagement will follow in the first half of 2015. The chief ombudsman’s findings and recommendations will then be publicly reported.

**Have your say**
The PSA will be contributing to the review and encourages all our members to have their say on this important issue. We will be working with the ombudsman’s office to keep you updated on the public engagement period, as well as the findings of the review.

### Agencies selected for the formal review
- Accident Compensation Corporation
- Department of Corrections
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Justice
- New Zealand Customs Service
- New Zealand Defence Force
- New Zealand Transport Agency
- Ministry of Social Development
- Ministry of Transport
- State Services Commission

### Criteria used to select agencies for the formal review
- Size of agency (FTEs)
- Number of OIA requests received per year (where data exists)
- Number of OIA complaints to the ombudsman
- Number of OIA delay complaints upheld by the ombudsman
- Length of time taken to respond to OIAs (where data exists)
- Broad coverage of the core public sector
- Inclusion of at least one agency that has been cited for embodying good OIA practice, as well as those cited for poor practice
The OIA and the quest for no surprises

In April, New Zealand Herald journalist David Fisher will be one of our speakers for the PSA’s 2015 In the thick of it series to discuss his perspectives on the OIA. Below are excerpts from a speech he gave last year on this issue. The full speech is available at the New Zealand Herald’s website (www.nzherald.co.nz).

The difference between when I started 25 years ago and now is astounding when it comes to dealing with the public service.

When I started as a journalist, if I was writing a story which in any way touched on the public’s interaction with government, I would pick up the phone and ring an official. It really was that easy.

The “no surprises” policy had been a feature of coalition agreements since 1996, and part of the SOE model. It did what it said on the box – meant there would be no surprises for the government. Initially, it was a safety valve put into an agreement – a chance for someone to ask, is it a good idea to sell half of Transpower without telling the prime minister. Big things. Really big.

But before long, it crept out of SOEs and political agreements and spread its grip through the public service.

Ministers realised they had a device through which they could reduce the surprises they suffered. And, as it went on, the surprises ministers no longer wanted to experience became greater in number and smaller in significance.

Increasingly, it placed on the public service a political imperative which it had never had to shoulder. It had to think about what it might be that would surprise a minister. Decisions were made with the minister’s discomfort in mind. Decisions were being made which were political in nature.

I’ll tell you an exception, or an example of doing it right – the Police. It is not an exception which governs the entire agency, because there’s always headquarters. But with so many public facing staff, there is an acceptance staff will speak. Trying to stop them all from speaking on matters in which they are involved would be like trying to catch rain drops.

It is 30 years since the OIA began working in practice, 32 years since it was passed. There is so much that we ask for which is standard, it’s hard to understand why it is not classified as people go. Surely after 30 years of dealing with largely the same type of information, it should be known what can be withheld and what can be released.

There should be no surprises, for anyone.

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Survey shows hard road for public sector reforms

In their first report, the researchers say the survey reveals a public sector that is “adequate and even good in some respects”. They note workers are committed and motivated, but “poor management and organisational systems get in the way of doing a good job”.

The researchers identify a number of pressure points within organisations where better systems and managerial capabilities would result in improved workplaces and better outcomes.

Managerial shortcomings

The researchers note that public servants believe their managers do not base decisions on facts and analysis. In addition, a third of the respondents believe that managers do not devote enough effort to developing staff and do not deal with staff honestly.

The area where respondents scored their managers highest – the only one of 12 positive statements about managers in the survey the majority of respondents agreed with – was in understanding workers’ needs to meet responsibilities outside work.

The researchers write, “A striking aspect of the survey is the high number of ‘neutral’ responses (‘3’ on the Likert scale) – a no-man’s land between ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ – ranging from 24 per cent to 43 per cent across the board. This doesn’t mean that public servants have no opinion or don’t care about their workplaces. It may suggest they have very mixed feelings about their managers and the organisations that employ them.”

Workplace processes

Human resource practices are another area of weakness according to the researchers. “Overall, public servants’ experiences have deteriorated in all four areas (authority, information, rewards and knowledge) over the last decade, compared with an earlier study of high-performance New Zealand work systems.”

Organisational systems

On a positive note, most respondents say their organisations’ objectives, priorities and direction are clear, as are their own responsibilities. On the other hand, only one in five respondents agree change is handled well in their organisation.

As communications roles continue to be singled out by the Government for reductions under the core public services cap, it’s telling that half of all respondents say communication across all sections of their organisation is not good, and another quarter were ambivalent. Knowledge-sharing and cooperation also scored poorly.

Organisational performance

One of the more troubling aspects of the results is that most public servants do not think their organisation is achieving its potential. As the researchers write, “In fact, this statement got the lowest positive rating of any in the survey, pointing to a wide gap between public sector goals and outcomes or what staff think is possible.”

They add, “Respondents were particularly ambivalent about whether organisations are doing a good job of satisfying their clients, with almost half answering ‘neutral’ and only a third agreeing. There is still a long way to go to achieve the Better Public Service goal of ‘greater responsiveness within the public sector to the needs and expectations of New Zealanders, and a commitment to continuous improvement’.”

Workplace

Have your say!

In September we will be conducting another workplace survey. Now is your chance to be involved in determining the issues to be covered in the survey. Contact PSA policy advisor Kirsten Windelov at kirsten.windelov@psa.org.nz to be involved.

Bullying in your workplace?

Put a stop to it now. It’s not OK.

Bullying is a workplace hazard that can breach the Health and Safety Act.

If you need advice or support talk to your PSA delegate or organiser.

Speak to your delegate:

Email enquiries@psa.org.nz
Freephone 0508 367 772

Public servants want to make a difference

In their second report, the researchers say that public servants are generally satisfied with their work and want to do a good job. While the high level of satisfaction and commitment are positive, there are some worrying issues that the researchers’ analysis highlights.

Gender inequality

Yes, the elephant in the room continues to be gender inequality. The public service is “rapidly ageing and increasingly female” with the State Services Commission estimating that over half of all public servants are women. Yet, gender inequality in pay persists with men’s average pay band at $60,000-$70,000 which is $10,000 higher than women’s.

Gender inequality also exists in working conditions with female public servants having less flexible working arrangements – just over 70 per cent of women who responded to the survey ‘strongly disagree’ that their work hours are determined entirely by themselves, compared with just under 30 per cent of men.

As the researchers note, “This is disappointing, given that women’s need for flexibility is arguably greater than men’s. They are more than twice as likely to be the main carers of children and other family members (68 per cent versus 32 per cent) a dual role that relies on the ability to successfully juggle work and home obligations.”

Bullying and discrimination

The researchers note that the high rate of workplace bullying in the public sector is of concern. A third of respondents experienced bullying within the previous six months of when the survey was conducted. One in four respondents say they have been bullied ‘now and then’. Reported rates of discrimination are similar with employment status and age as the leading causes of discrimination, followed by ethnicity and gender.

The researchers note, “Many organisations with a high rate of bullying have poor human resources practices and poor management, and are places where employees feel they have little voice. Bad managers do not know how to deal with complaints because bad management tolerates bad systems.”

The researchers say high-bullying organisations report higher motivation, but overall they have lower organisational performance.

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Workload

Yes, you are working harder. Just over half the respondents said they worked about an extra six hours a week on average. Of these, only one worker in five is financially compensated and half cannot take time in lieu. In other words, about one million hours of overtime goes uncompensated every year.

The researchers write, “Extrapolated across the public sector, this suggests a worrying reliance on unpaid labour as a way of dealing with the situation described on the Better Public Services website of ‘increasing expectations for better public services in the context of prolonged financial constraints compounded by the global financial crisis’.”

The researchers caution that subjective reports of things like work hours are not always accurate, “but the findings do indicate pressure points with workloads”.


Have your say!

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Around and about

PSA people, events, meetings and gatherings

Living Wage

Festival of the Elements, Waitangi Day. Stella Teariki, Martin Gregory and Conor Twyford

Wellington delegate training

Celebrating our members

Trevor Day and Gordon Mosley

Trevor (Sid) Burrows and Chris Buckler
2015 Auckland Pride Parade

A number of PSA members marched in this year’s Pride Parade. For some, it was the first time they were able to march in the parade in uniform.

Big gay out

Jo Wrigley

Gene Saunders talks with interested attendee

Murray Bean

Round the Bays, Wellington – “All the way for equal pay”

Nikki Pilgrim

Bev King and Margaret Forbes

Christine Ross, Caroline Mayston, Cheryl Reynolds, Liz Byron, Erin Polaczuk and Rachel MacDonald
Established by the NZ Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), UnionAID works with partners in developing countries to support the rights of workers. Through the years the organisation has backed a number of projects in Myanmar, India, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. It’s done all of that on a modest budget and a core group of volunteers.

With increasing pressures on workers around the world, however, the UnionAID team wanted to do more. In May 2014 they hired their first employee – executive officer Michael Naylor who works part time for the organisation and is working on his Masters in development studies at Victoria University of Wellington.

“We have a committed group of volunteers who already have incredible networks. My role has been to build on our strengths and provide continuity across our work,” says Michael.

With increased capacity, the organisation has already been able to commit to more projects.

“Right now we have eight projects on the go. We are continuing to support several long-term projects, but we have also taken on a number of short-term projects.”

One of those short-term projects is in Fiji – the first time UnionAID has funded a project in the Pacific.

“With its manufacturing base, Fiji actually has a history of union action,” Michael says. “The project aims to improve workers’ understanding of their wage rights. Our project leader is Kuini Lutua who has extensive background in union activism and is the former general secretary of the Fiji Nurses Association. She’s working with the National Union of Factory and Commercial Workers.”

Michael says one of the strengths of UnionAID is its nimbleness and ability to take on smaller, worker-driven projects.

“Most aid organisations that are dedicated to development just don’t have the processes in place to move quickly. We do. What that means is we can tailor our support to what workers need – from longer-term projects, such as some of our work in Myanmar, to our 10-month project in Fiji.”

While Michael has always been an activist and supported the rights of workers (he worked for the Labour party as policy advisor before coming to UnionAID), his background is in international development.

“What I have seen through UnionAID is that unions have a very important role in development work. Unfortunately, whether because of politics or how development work is often funded, there isn’t much discussion about the value of unions in developing nations. That makes UnionAID’s work crucial for our partners, but
The Myanmar Young Leaders Project was established in 2009. The programme brings young leaders from Myanmar to New Zealand each year to study English language, development and human rights so they can contribute to the growing democracy in their own country. UnionAID works with Victoria University of Wellington to run the six-month programme with funding provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 2015, UnionAID will host a three-day conference in Myanmar for alumni of the programme. The conference will include training on topics such as democracy and local government administration. It will also provide an opportunity for attendees to network.

“One of our goals for the programme has been to have cohorts work collectively. This conference will be an opportunity to extend cooperation and connections across the cohorts,” Michael says.

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also to illustrate how unions can make a positive difference.”

Michael says an example of this is a long-running project that UnionAID previously supported in Tamil Nadu, India.

“The Tamil Nadu Labour Union in South India organises dalit (people who are at the bottom of the Hindu caste system) men and women, who are employed as scavengers, sweepers, quarry workers, and graveyard workers. As you can imagine, much of the work they do is low paying and things like worker safety are a real issue. But by training hundreds of local leaders and building a strong union membership, the situation of these workers has vastly improved,” he says.

Michael says that’s the kind of transformation UnionAID would like to support across Asia and the Pacific.

“Right now we are looking at several potential new projects, including one in the Philippines,” he says.

“We continue to work as a volunteer-driven organisation that depends on our networks and the generosity of our donors. A big part of our success can be attributed to the fact that we are a workers-helping-workers organisation. And as union members here in New Zealand know, that’s a powerful and effective way to make real change.”

Want to help?
Join as a regular solidarity donor. Even a few dollars a month makes a big difference.
Sign up through www.unionaid.org.nz.
It is good that the Reserve Bank has stopped raising its Official Cash Rate. That has helped bring down the exchange rate which is still far too high. Interest rate reductions would help bring it down further, but the Reserve Bank would need to take other action against speculation in housing and in financial markets.

Deflation is not necessarily a good thing. It is to be feared when an economy is contracting, people are losing their jobs and businesses are closing. That can end in a downward spiral that only government action can fix by spending financed by printing money (“quantitative easing”) or borrowing. While everything is not right we are certainly not in this situation. But neither can we just sit back and relax.

Falling prices aren’t of much benefit if incomes fall too or rise very slowly. For New Zealand workers there is a lot of catching up due. The market economy’s productivity has grown faster than real wages (wages adjusted for price increases) since the bottom of the recession in 2009. The wages share of the nation’s income fell over that period from 51.2 per cent to 50.0 per cent.

Public sector workers are especially due for a catch-up. In the year to December 2014, the pay rates of healthcare and social assistance workers went up only 0.7 per cent according to the Labour Cost Index, falling behind the 0.8 per cent increase in prices measured by the Consumer Price Index. Central government administration, defence and public safety workers’ pay rates rose 1.3 per cent and education and training only 1.0 per cent, compared to 1.8 per cent for the private sector. Pay rates of all public sector jobs except in electricity, gas, water and waste services have fallen behind inflation since June 2009.

And that’s only average wage increases. People on lower incomes have tended to get lower increases. The difference between the median (middle) wage and the average wage is growing. In addition, there are big pay equity issues, demonstrated by the aged-care workers’ case that women are systematically underpaid in that sector.

Low-income households have also seen faster price increases than higher-income households. Part of that is increasingly unaffordable housing, especially in Auckland and Christchurch. Prices need to be tamed, but affordability also needs higher incomes.

What is holding pay rises back? It is obvious for government-funded employers: government policy. For all workers unemployment, at 5.7 per cent or 143,000 people, continues to be high for New Zealand, especially with the economy growing at its current rate. This is partly caused by welfare policies which push people into work when there are not enough jobs – and certainly not enough decent ones. The Reserve Bank described the situation in its December Monetary Policy Statement as: “some excess labour supply remains, with elevated net immigration and high labour force participation boosting labour supply”. Employers are also using immigration to avoid training needs and paying higher wages. And finally, of course, the Government has over several years weakened collective bargaining and with it workers’ bargaining power.

With lower inflation and lower incomes, debt (such as mortgages) and interest rates get harder to pay off. Because we have such low inflation, real mortgage and credit card interest rates (interest rates after taking account of expected inflation) are as high and higher than they were during the mid-2000s. Historically, inflation is an important way that people and governments dig themselves out of indebtedness. New Zealand as a whole has high debt levels that need to reduce. It is harder to do in times of low inflation.

When Sam Huggard was elected to the role of New Zealand Council of Trade Unions’ (NZCTU) secretary last October he already had a strong track record for working in membership organisations.

Sam says many of his national organising skills go back to his days as co-president of the New Zealand University Students’ Association.

“Our focus was on capacity building and ensuring students had a voice. That work taught me the power of working collectively and laid the foundation for my work in membership organisations,” he says.

Immediately prior to coming to NZCTU, Sam worked as the campaigns officer for FIRST Union which includes workers across the finance, industrial, retail, stores and transport sectors.

“My background in the not-for-profit sector and unions has given me a good sense of what is effective and what isn’t in terms of campaigns and advocacy work.

“That experience has really helped me better understand the unique needs of NZCTU’s 35 affiliated unions and their members. When we work together well, unions are a powerful force for good in society.”

**Time for a change**

In that vein, in 2015 NZCTU will roll out a major pay rise campaign. Sam says it’s an issue that cuts across the union movement and is one that demands a unified response.

“Many workers have had low pay increases or no pay increases at all in the last few years. This is especially true for those without access to a union, as we know that last year 98 per cent of people who bargained collectively got a pay rise, but only 48 per cent of workers who had to go it alone on an individual agreement got a raise.

“Workers are overdue a catch-up in an economy that is growing, but where real wages have not kept pace.”

**Building stronger unions**

While the union movement continues to be New Zealand’s largest social movement, Sam says there’s a need to raise the profile of what unions do for workers and to continue to increase union membership.

“Union growth is crucial if we are going to be successful. It’s also important that we continue to build our leadership capabilities within our unions and find ways to increase membership activism,” he says.

“Key to building a stronger union movement is ensuring young people are included. From my experience, young people tend to be quite keen to be part of the union movement and understand the importance of collective action, but many have never been asked to join,” Sam says.

He adds that many unions are taking a proactive approach to encouraging young people to be part of their union’s future. He says the conscious effort to include young people, along with appointing young leaders in national union positions (such as our own Erin Polaczuk) is helping to change the face of the union movement.

**Supporting a strong state**

Sam says there are also a number of advocacy issues he would like to progress, including combating insecure work, and articulating a strong defence of public provision of services and a strong state.

“The union movement is a progressive movement, and a strong state is at the core of progressive thinking. State sector unions run effective campaigns on issues such as funding, safe staffing and the imposition of a business model on education and other services. I see an active role for the CTU to draw these links for workers in industries outside the public sector, in defence of a strong, progressive state,” he says.

While the role of secretary is demanding, Sam’s also committed to maintaining a good work-life balance. He lives in Wellington with his partner and young son and says being an active parent and a good partner are top priorities.

**Developing leaders**

In February, the NZCTU ran its second residential leadership programme in the Wellington region. The two-week programme targets emerging union leaders, aiming to equip them with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to take on senior leadership roles within their unions. The programme focuses on developing strategic thinking on union growth and capacity building, including leadership development of Māori, Pasifika, women and youth.
Employment Relations Act changes – a primer

The Employment Relations Act changes came into effect on 6 March 2015. In this issue of Working Life we provide an overview of the changes to the Act.

Collective bargaining and collective agreements
Employers will be able to opt out of multi-employer collective bargaining.

The definition of good faith no longer includes specific mention of the duty to conclude a collective agreement. Employers (and unions) can apply to the Employment Relations Authority for a declaration that bargaining is concluded.

Unions will now be required to give notice of any strike action and employers will be able to make proportionate wage deductions for partial strike action.

This could leave employees with a weakened bargaining position but please see our best defence idea below.

New employees
Before the changes, a new employee in a workplace with a collective employment agreement would have automatically been employed on the basis of that collective agreement for their first 30 days of employment. This ensured new employees were protected from being offered inferior terms and conditions.

Under the changes, new employees no longer need to be offered the same terms and conditions as those provided by the collective agreement (unless there is an agreement in place to the contrary). This change will make new employees vulnerable to pressure to accept inferior terms and conditions and, over time, may serve to undermine everyone’s terms and conditions.

Flexible working arrangements
All employees – not only those with caring responsibilities – can now request flexible working arrangements. Requests can be made from the beginning of employment and there is no limit on the number of requests that can be made. Employers need to consider and respond to requests as soon as possible, but no later than within one month of the request.

Employment Relations Authority
At the conclusion of Employment Relations Authority hearings, the Authority must provide either an oral determination or an oral indication of its findings (subject to additional evidence) and must issue a written determination within three months. While this may sound like it will speed things up, in the long run it could lead to less well-considered decisions and an increase in the number of challenges (appeals).

Meal and rest breaks
An employer can now impose certain restrictions on an employee’s meal and rest breaks. If the parties cannot agree, the employer can specify times and durations for breaks. If breaks are not provided, the employer is required to make reasonable compensatory measures – which can mean, later start time, earlier finish time or time off in lieu of the breaks.

Access to information
An employer is no longer required to provide access to confidential information when proposing to make a decision which could have an adverse impact on an employee’s continuation of employment. This will make it more difficult for an employee seeking appointment to a vacancy during a restructure.

Terms and conditions for cleaners, caterers and hospital orderlies
If the new employer has less than 20 employees, employees’ terms and conditions will no longer be protected when they are transferred to a new employer. For larger employers, employees will have five working days to elect to transfer to the new employer, unless otherwise agreed.

Outgoing employers will now be required to provide all information about their employees to the new employer unless contractually required to keep it confidential.

The best defence
As national secretary Richard Wagstaff says, “The best and only defence is a strong union with high membership. These changes to employment law can be overcome when everyone is in the union.”

How can you build the number of PSA members in your workplace?
Often it’s as simple as inviting people to become members or offering to provide them with more information about the PSA. In fact, the number one reason non-members give for not joining the union is that no one has invited them to.

Even if you work in an organisation that has a PSA delegate or a team of delegates who coordinate a recruitment programme a personal invitation is important. Be open with your non-member colleagues about why you belong to the PSA and the gains that can be made when we all work together.

We do better together – You get to have a say – Unions are there when you need them.
Currently, WorkSafe is working with public sector organisations involved in high-risk activities, such as Police, Defence and the Fire Service, to promote strong health and safety practice. While these agencies are the highest immediate priority, the work doesn’t stop there. We are also beginning to work with agencies right across the sector, promoting sound health and safety practices at all levels.

WorkSafe has been tasked with leading the way in changing the health and safety landscape of New Zealand. As part of this effort, they want to work with public sector employers, workers, the PSA and other unions on making the state sector a safer place to work.

For more information, visit www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/about/reform. You can sign up for updates on the Bill (and a range of other topics) at www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/about/subscribe.
Online dating has been around for years, but improving technology – smartphones in particular – has led to a rapid rise in usage, particularly by under 35s.

For many people, the traditional dating scene is just not that fun. If you are looking for a partner, and you are in a stable group of friends who have been together for a long time, chances are you might find it tricky to meet new people. If you are feeling too old for (or just not interested in) the nightclubbing scene, then online dating can be an excellent alternative.

There are a number of different dating websites and apps, each with their own quirks, user base, and mix of strengths and weaknesses. For those interested in online dating, below are some of your options:

**Tinder** is the former upstart challenger turned establishment beast. Tinder requires an iPhone or Android smartphone, and a Facebook account (which it uses to source your photos and interests). You can search for other Tinder users by age, gender and how far away they are from you. You can’t restrict searches by sexuality, so it is harder for people looking for a non-heterosexual match. Once you have defined your search, Tinder shows you a profile picture of a person, along with their name and age – you can look at their profile in more depth (usually two to five photos and a few lines of text) and then either “tick” or “cross” them. If you and another user both tick each other, Tinder will notify you. From there you can privately chat with them, and, if you want, arrange to meet up in person. Tinder is primarily used for hook-ups rather than those looking for long-term relationships, and the age range tends to skew younger (under 26).

**OkCupid** has been around for more than 10 years, and is one of the dominant worldwide dating sites. You can use it on a computer or an iPhone/Android phone, and it claims that its algorithm provides you with the best quality matches of any site. The standard OkCupid profile offers significantly more detail than apps such as Tinder, and in addition to listing attributes such as height, ethnicity, and age, you can also list whether or how often you drink or smoke, if you want children and more. Lastly, OkCupid offers a near limitless number of questions, often open-ended, to which you can provide answers if you wish. This means that a complete profile on OkCupid give you an insight into how a person thinks. The system compares your answers with someone you are looking at and gives you a percentage compatibility rating. OkCupid is used for both hook-ups and dating.

**FindSomeone** is owned by Fairfax (publishers of Stuff.co.nz and some of New Zealand’s newspapers), and is New Zealand only. Unlike Tinder and OKCupid, many features, including seeing compatibility, on FindSomeone are pay only. In other words, heavy users may need to stump up the cash for a premium account to get the full benefit although you can jump in with a free account to get a taster. The pay option means that FindSomeone tends to skew a little older than other services, while also being more focused on relationships rather than hook-ups. It is only available as a website, but the website is fully functional in a smartphone browser.

There are plenty of other options out there too, including Grindr (for men looking for men), NZ Dating (the first major local site, more used for hook-ups), and Match.com (the world’s biggest, but not as well used locally).

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**A few pointers**

Just like trying to meet people offline, online dating can be fun but it can also be frustrating or infuriating. Keep in mind that people may not be who they appear. If you are meeting someone in person, do it in a public space, and never give out your address or credit card details to someone online.

Lastly, a word for our male readers – men on online dating sites have an (often deserved) reputation for some unpleasant and downright gross behaviour. Harassing women who have said they are not interested, getting angry if someone does not respond, or sending unsolicited naked pictures of yourself just isn’t ok. Don’t be one of those guys.

In the coming years, more and more couples will be able to say that they met online – will you be one of them?
Review of the security environment for the Ministry of Social Development

In February, the Independent review of the security environment for the Ministry of Social Development was released. Commissioned by the chief executive of the Ministry for Social Development (MSD), the independent review was conducted to consider the physical security environment following the tragic shootings at the Ashburton Work and Income office.

The PSA served on the advisory group for this report, representing the views of our 6400 members at the MSD.

PSA national secretary Richard Wagstaff says the review lays the groundwork for ensuring the safety of all public sector workers.

“The 12 recommendations set the framework for the next stage of work, including issues raised by our members, such as the need for better ongoing training for dealing with aggressive client behaviour and improving reporting,” Richard says.

As the reviewers noted in their observations, MSD’s approach to safety and security has “evolved over time, rather than being deliberately defined as a consequence of strategic planning”.

This approach has meant that while there are some system-wide policies in place, many parts of the organisation have developed their own set method for managing security risks based on their “service, client and stakeholder characteristics”.

In the first of the 12 recommendations, the reviewers suggest that MSD should develop its “explicit safety and security operating model, based on the Risk Appetite work that has already progressed”. In this context, risk appetite represents MSD’s defining risk characteristics to determine the appropriate level of tolerance and mitigations. This system-wide approach is an overarching recommendation that is expected to create a greater level of “formal purpose and control over safety and security” across the organisation.

While the reviewers developed a list of recommendations to improve safety and security within MSD, they also note that similar to their findings in Phase 1 the event in Ashburton was not preventable. They state, “That event was extreme at every level, and even if the Ministry fully adopts and implements all of our recommendations, while in our view this would improve the overall security environment of the Ministry’s workplaces, extreme events could still occur.”

Across government

The reviewers also identified a number of safety and security issues to be considered for the wider public sector. These issues range from information sharing, to co-locations, to mental health.

Richard says the PSA welcomes all aspects of the review and looks forward to working with central agencies and individual organisations to ensure the security and safety of public servants across the sector.

“We are pleased to see the report discuss implications for the wider state sector, as so many lessons MSD has learned should be applied more widely.”


New membership fees

PSA membership fees and the fee bands have been reviewed, as required by the rules every two years, and adjusted to reflect wage and price movements. From 1 March, the threshold for the top band will be lifted to $39,104 and the bottom threshold to $18,380.

The new fees will $16.70 a fortnight for the top band, $8.30 a fortnight for the middle band, and $4.10 a fortnight bottom band. The fee for associate membership, which is open to former members who resign or retire from the public sector, remains at $50 a year.
How to go back to work successfully

While you will be reading this in March, as I write we are still in early January and this is my second day back at work after a two-week summer break. No matter how much you might love your job, getting back in the groove after an extended break is always tricky.

So, how do you do it? With the summer break over, here’s our guide to getting back in the office after being out of it for an extended period of time.

Ease yourself back in
You won’t be at peak efficiency for a little while. Don’t beat yourself up over this – if possible, commit yourself to less work after the break than you were doing immediately before. Your brain and your body will take some time to get back into your previous level of on-the-job expertise, so try not to stress if simple tasks take longer than you think they should.

Find a break if possible
Wellingtonians and Aucklanders are lucky here – their provincial anniversary days fall in January, and mean you can have a shortened week within your first month back. Nelsonians get a day off in early February, and then Waitangi weekend gives all of us a break. Enjoy it! Have a holiday at home with friends, or a BBQ on the beach, or take the kids to the zoo. This early break will, counterintuitively, help you get reaccustomed to life at work.

Those summery nights
Summer nights are long – make the most of the sunshine. If you are working 9 to 5 (or something close to it), you will have sun for hours when you get home. Eat dinner outside, go for a walk with a loved one – make the most of the sun. When winter comes around and you are leaving and getting home when it is dark, you will appreciate the memories.

Your work friends are pretty cool
You know the ones – those people you sit across from and talk to every day, but would never think of hanging out with outside of work hours. Work friends are great – you will spend more time with them than you will with most of your “actual” friends, but you never think you will miss them after a few weeks apart. Well, you are back now, and it is time to rekindle those bonds. They, more than anyone, can help support you through the tough times that even the best job will have.

Buy something nice
At some point in the first week, go and buy yourself something just because you want to. Don’t break the bank, but get something you desire – whether it’s a block of chocolate, a bottle of wine or a new TV. Then, as you savour your purchase, remind yourself that having a job definitely has its benefits.

Have flexibility? Use it
Not all jobs have it, but if your role allows for flexible working hours, then make the most of it. Go out for breakfast with a loved one before arriving at work late, and spend an extra hour making it up at the end of the day. Take an extended lunch break for a wander around the water. Go home early to down a beer or two on the back deck. If you have the flexibility, use it.

We are all in the same boat
Most importantly, if you are frustrated or grumpy about your holiday being over, don’t take it out on others. Your local barista? She probably worked through, except maybe the stats, so don’t be grumpy if she forgets your regular coffee order. The receptionist at work? He probably misses hanging out with his kids, so don’t have a go at him if he transfers you a phone call you didn’t want to take. We are all in this together, and if you are unhappy to be back at work, chances are others feel just the same.

Not long to go
We have all got at least four weeks annual leave – and next summer isn’t that far away. Find the time to enjoy the good parts of your working life, and stand alongside your workmates in the PSA to build on those while lessening the unenjoyable parts.

And, if worst comes to worst, there’s less than 365 days to go...
As Michael writes in The Catch, it’s an international problem, but with the fourth largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the world and seafood exports accounting for over $1 billion per year, it’s also a problem that’s very close to home for New Zealand.

A seasoned investigative journalist, Michael has been reporting on commercial fishing for decades, but it was his experience as a VSA volunteer in American Samoa in the 1970s where he first witnessed the poor working conditions found on many commercial fishing boats.

“Historically, there’s been a nobleness associated with fishers – think of St Peter – which is a deeply ingrained part of our culture. What I have seen over the years, however, is that the reality is quite different. Commercial fishing is an extremely lucrative business with fishing boats tending to be hierarchical places where the captain is master and crew members are expected to obey. There’s also a fair bit of ‘I’m beyond the law’ within the industry.”

Michael had thought about writing a book about the connection between over-fishing and workers’ rights for several years, particularly after investigating the identities of the 29 men who disappeared from the Tai Ching 21, a Taiwanese fishing vessel, in 2008. But it was after the Oyang 70, a foreign charter fishing vessel, sunk off the South Island in 2010 that Michael received a call from Awa Press editor-in-chief Mary Varnham.

“Mary [Varnham] is a publisher who is willing to take on the status quo. For example, one of Awa Press’s other books is Tragedy at Pike River Mine. She called me and said, ‘You need to write this book now.’”

Maritime Union of New Zealand national secretary Joe Fleetwood said following the release of the Coroner’s report on the Oyang 70, “It is a stain on New Zealand’s conscience that these ships of shame were allowed to be operated in New Zealand waters.”

As The Catch demonstrates, however, there is much blame to go around. With a seemingly insatiable appetite for seafood and the growing interest in premium products, governments and the fishing industry have responded to market demands.

Culpability also lies with the consumer. “Most people are blissfully unaware of how the fish they eat are caught and processed,” Michael says. “But even conscientious consumers assume fish labelled ‘Produce of New Zealand’ has been caught and processed under fair working conditions and sustainable fishing practices. What the Oyang 70 highlighted is that’s not necessarily the case.”

Michael says media coverage on the sinking of the Oyang 70, along with the work of University of Auckland Business School senior lecturer Christina Stringer and PhD candidate Glenn Simmons who researched the working conditions on foreign charter fishing vessels, meant New Zealand was in the uncomfortable position of explaining to the world how inhumane working conditions and unsustainable and illegal fishing practices could occur within New Zealand’s EEZ.

“We put the spotlight on an issue that was well known within the industry and even within government, but was not something the general public was aware of,” he says.

“Like other cultures, New Zealanders like to believe our own myths. We see ourselves as a fair country for workers and that our quota management system that controls commercial fishing is world-leading and sustainable. What we uncovered made it impossible to keep believing the myths.”

The last chapter of The Catch is entitled Hope. After reading the first 200 pages of the book that might not be the first thing that comes to the reader’s mind, particularly since the problems are on an international scale. And yet, as Michael writes, here in New Zealand a bill to strengthen the regulation of foreign-owned commercial fishing vessels in New Zealand passed its third and final reading last July. The new regulation will require all foreign charter vessels to carry the New Zealand flag from 1 May 2016 and operate under full New Zealand legal jurisdiction.

Michael says it’s a start. “Highlighting this issue has put both national and international pressure on the fishing industry and the New Zealand government. Many fishing companies still show an appalling lack of respect for their workers, fish stocks and the world’s oceans. The difference is now the public knows that and with knowledge comes the power to change things.”

The Catch: How fishing companies reinvented slavery and plunder the oceans by Michael Field, Awa Press, 2014.
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- Car Hire
- Computers & IT
- Insurance Policies

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VIJIT Crossword 248

ACROSS
1 Someone on the United States train is quite a card. (8, 7)
9 Everything in the trial for the highest. (7)
10 A twinkle starts a glimpse of French sea. (7)
12 Offer a lure to bring in wild. (5)
14 Any longer in synthetic material. (5)
15 True fruit sound? (5)
16 A team apart. (5)
18 A cry of pain or cowardice. (6)
19 Rich decade, make ready for the feast. (6)
20 Oriental vessel, a small warship... (1-4)
23 ... happening to be in eastern port. (5)
24 Disband a demonstration to note. (5)
25 What the thief does, and what the policeman does to him. (5)
30 Smelling about engineering monarch. (7)
31 Then, or a different one. (7)
32 Trivia prove humour is important. (8, 7)

DOWN
1 Stooped to cycle, carried 1 Nearly great tone set by chief legalist. (8, 7)
2 Wriggles out with the fish. (4)
3 Soft pencil used to be a goat. (4)
4 She plays with current hair style. (7)
5 Angles used to be found here, hence the name. (7)
6 Brace yourself for a fruity sound. (4)
7 Image orthicon tube produced this? Quite a prize! (4)
8 Disbanding committees for using washing machines. (9, 6)
11 Bend shipping company in a knot. (7)
13 Record dish. (7)
16 Cow with notes about direction. (3)
17 Left, left, left swimmer. (3)
21 Include call in tub. (5, 2)
22 Hail financial demand. (7)
26 Gallant sound of knot. (4)
27 Soldiers brought up on hydrogen breath. (4)
28 Secure missile? (4)
29 Unusual singular word for article with initial energy. (4)

The power of words.
Top of bollards on The Terrace, Wellington. Email your caption to WorkingLife@psa.org.nz or send to Working Life, PO Box 3817, Wellington. You can send as many entries as you like. The closing date is 15 April 2015.

Crossword 248
A gift voucher for the first correct entry to be drawn. Send entries to Working Life, PO Box 3817, Wellington. Or email a scan to WorkingLife@psa.org.nz. The closing date is 15 April 2015.

Crossword 247 winner
Congratulations to associate member Jim Jarmin. He wins a $40 gift voucher.

Caption the moment
Congratulations to Ezekiel Hauwaho at Inland Revenue who wins a $40 gift voucher for the best caption.

Caption winner
"Just like the Mother Mary, I’m in labour"
Congratulations to Ezekiel Hauwaho at Inland Revenue who wins a $40 gift voucher for the best caption.

The power of words.
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