

Crown casino workers win big pay bump under Blackstone ownership

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Thousands of Crown casino workers have received a 5 per cent pay rise under their new private equity owner Blackstone, driving an end-of-year upsurge in wages for collective agreements.

The United Workers Union reached the one-year deal for Crown's 8400 workers at its Melbourne and Perth casinos ahead of negotiations for a more long-term agreement later this year.



Casino workers at Crown Melbourne will also receive penalty loadings for the first time in 30 years. **Chris Hopkins**

The pay rise, approved this month, was the highest in enterprise agreements lodged in the final fortnight of 2022 and lifted the average wage increase under the deals for 51,012 staff to a high of 4.1 per cent a year.

Crown's pay rise was backdated to July 1 and was not far off inflation in the year ended June 30, which was 6.1 per cent, said UWU casino director Dario Mujkic.

“Cost of living and price increases were the No. 1 concern for members so getting a good wage outcome was the most critical thing,” he said.

While members are yet to complete claims for the next round of bargaining in April or May, Mr Mujkic said talks would take place in the context of much higher inflation and

pay claims were unlikely to be less than 5 per cent – “they might be on the other side”.

Melbourne’s 5500 casino workers also won penalty rates for the first time in 30 years under the deal and will receive a \$6-an-hour allowance for working nights on Friday to Sunday and \$3-an-hour for working the weekend days.

Mr Mujkic said the move made sense for the business, which had struggled to get workers to work nights or weekends when they had been paid the same for weekdays.

A Crown Resorts spokesman thanked the UWU “for their commitment to negotiating what is a great outcome for team members”, including improved personal leave.

“These agreements give us the opportunity to enhance the strong foundations already laid as well as help us to sustainably grow a business that encourages talented individuals to take up a career in hospitality and tourism,” he said.

He said the agreements “build on the relationship between Crown and the UWU and lead to better outcomes for each as we reposition Crown for the future”.

The relationship is in stark contrast to the 2019 negotiations, which led to mass protests in Melbourne [<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/crown-casino-to-be-hit-with-friday-night-strike-20191028-p53516.html>] and protected industrial action in Perth.

Blackstone’s a smart operator

Mr Mujkic credited [Blackstone](https://www.afr.com/companies/games-and-wagering/blackstone-8-9b-takeover-of-crown-ends-packer-s-reign-on-asx-20220623-p5aw7v), [https://www.afr.com/companies/games-and-wagering/blackstone-8-9b-takeover-of-crown-ends-packer-s-reign-on-asx-20220623-p5aw7v] which took over Crown in July and has a history of investing in hospitality staff, for “really good, honest and productive discussions that helped negotiations move much more quickly than they historically had”.

“It might sound surprising at first, as it’s a private equity operator, but they’re a smart operator and realise treating staff well makes good business sense,” he said.

“It sets up staff-management relations for a more positive future.”

Crown’s wages were the highest in the Fair Work Commission’s (FWC) latest wage data for new agreements filed from December 17 to December 30, released on Monday.

Educational services recorded the next best pay rise at an average 4.5 per cent a year for 16,192 workers, followed by manufacturing with 4.2 per cent covering 1840 workers.

The FWC real-time wage data is highly variable and averaged 2.8 per cent pay rises in the previous fortnight.

However, the latest fortnightly average of 4.1 per cent is the highest since the wage series began mid-last year.