

ABC Radio Canberra Transcript – Steven Fanner

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Interviewer: Emma Bickley, ABC Presenter

Interviewee: Steven Fanner, ANU Chief Marketing and Communications Officer

Emma: We are at the Casey Marketplace, and we're about to talk about ANU. ANU staff voted this week on whether or not to forgo their upcoming 2.5% pay rise. It comes at the request of their Vice-Chancellor, Genevieve Bell, who told staff that foregoing their salary increase would save jobs by reducing the salary savings the University needs to find by as much as \$15 million. The ANU is staring down a \$200 million deficit for 2024 on top of \$400 million in operating deficits created between 2020 and 2023. Well today we can bring you the results of that staff vote. Steve Fanner is the ANU Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, and joins me on the line. Steve, welcome.

Steve: Good afternoon, Emma.

Emma: Thank you so much for joining us now. We've been hearing in the news that staff have come back with a resounding no. What was the result of the vote?

Steve: Yeah, thanks, Emma. It's important to be clear what this process is all about, and as you've outlined earlier, it's been well publicized that ANU has been operating in deficit for several years now, and needs to reduce its operating costs to get back to financial sustainability. Now, the University is trying to do this in a way that keeps the impact on ANU jobs at an absolute minimum, and we're giving our staff a say wherever we can about how we go about meeting those savings targets. So in this example, ANU staff were given the option of foregoing the upcoming automatic 2.5% pay increase that's due next month. This is a decision that would have saved \$15 million out of the \$100 million we need to save in total on salaries, and as our Vice-Chancellor said, it would have saved jobs at ANU. So we recognise this is a big ask, but our staff would still have received all of the other scheduled pay increases totalling 16% over the three years of the Enterprise Agreement. Now a majority of our staff have voted not to forgo this increase, and the University accepts this outcome. The 2.5% salary increase for our staff will therefore flow through to pay packets from next month, as planned under the Enterprise Agreement.

Emma: Now, given how big a decision this is, I'd imagine you had a good voter turnout. How many staff members voted?

Steve: Out of around 6,400 eligible staff to participate in this vote, we had more than three quarters of those, 4,700 odd, participating in the vote, and this has continued the strong engagement of ANU staff in our change consultation processes that we've been running lately. People care deeply about working at ANU, in a way that's probably different from a lot of other employers. We've set up a website called Renew ANU, which has been visited more than 80,000 times. We've had a number of town hall meetings where we've explained various changes that are being proposed for our academic structure and our staffing. And 8,000 people have attended those town halls, and a further 4,000 times those town hall recordings have been viewed from that Renew ANU website. The Change Proposal documents

that we've released so far have been opened more than 12,000 times. So this vote is just the latest example of how the ANU community and our staff is engaging in the consultative processes we are running and taking the chance to have their say on how we meet these financial challenges.

Emma: And the financial challenges are part of my next question, because the proposal would have saved you \$15 million had staff voted yes, so I guess the question is, how are you going to make those savings now?

Steve: Yes, look, we'll continue to consult with our staff about how we meet these savings targets, but they have been clearly communicated from the start, and they haven't changed. Our financial circumstances haven't changed. The savings that would have been achieved by forgoing the December pay increase will now need to be found elsewhere. Now, as I mentioned before, the University is pulling every lever it can to try and minimise the impact on jobs. We're working hard to reduce the large amount of accrued leave on our books and find some savings there. We offered our staff the option of having everyone make a small sacrifice by forgoing a pay increase to save a chunk of that savings target with no impact on jobs. The outcome of this ballot will unfortunately mean that more job cuts will be required to meet these savings targets.

Emma: Now in line with asking your staff to do that, Genevieve Bell has also asked ANU senior leaders to forego their 2.5% salary increase, and said at least this would save about \$1.2 million. What has been the outcome of that? Have the senior leaders agreed to that?

Steve: The senior leaders on performance-based employment contracts who were not covered by the Enterprise Agreement were asked separately to consider forgoing their own automatic pay increase. Those people have been given until the end of this month to respond to that request, so it's too early to say what the final outcome is, but of those that have responded so far, more than 95% have agreed to forego that increase. So there's a consistent support from the senior leadership of the University for the processes that we're going through to try and achieve those savings.

Emma: Now Steven Fanner, you are the ANU Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, have you yourself agreed to forgo the pay rise?

Steven: I have Emma, and I've encouraged those who work for me to consider making the same decision. Obviously, that's a decision everyone has to make for themselves, and I don't propose that anyone should make a decision simply because they've been asked to by a superior. They have to make that decision for themselves, but in my example, I did agree to forego that pay increase, and have encouraged those in my division to consider doing the same.

Emma: Now that Genevieve Bell herself has taken a 10% pay cut, have any other senior leaders at the ANU done something along these lines?

Steven: The decision of the Vice-Chancellor to show leadership in this regard is to be commended. She's taken on a very difficult job in restoring the University's finances during a difficult time for the sector overall, and she's leading by example here.

What she's done in offering to reduce her own salary by a substantial amount, by asking the senior leaders of the University on performance-based contracts to forgo the next salary increase they were expecting to receive, and providing all the staff at the University covered by the Enterprise Agreement the option of doing the same, we've got the leadership of the University trying to lead by example and be as consultative as we can in trying to meet these savings targets.

Emma: Steven, that's all we have time for today. Thanks for speaking to ABC Drive Program.

Steve: Thanks for having me, Emma.