



**Retired Telecommunications  
Employees Association**

# NEWSLETTER

**RTEA - Proud of its Union Origin**

**RTEA.NET.AU**

**August - September 2023**

## Welcome to your Newsletter

John Lane

**I would like to start this month by thanking members for their attendance at our August 2023 General Meeting at Emu Plains. We had Jim Fitzpatrick as our guest speaker at the meeting. Jim spoke about his 30 years in the RAAF as a navigator. Jim had a remarkable career with time spent in Southeast Asia, North America and the Antarctic.**

One of my takeaways from Jim's presentation was the skill and the calculations necessary to keep an aircraft on course. It was an exacting task. Compared to today, with our smartphone with GPS, we can get in a car and listen to the instructions to get to a destination with little chance of getting lost. We no longer need a "Gregorys" or someone next assisting with navigation.

We are grateful to Jim for taking the time to give us his presentation.

**Also, our esteemed member Jim Spencer celebrated his birthday on the same day as our meeting. Jim and his daughter came up on Zoom, and we all had an opportunity to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jim.**

We also held lunch at the Sydney Rowers Club, our most popular lunch spot. And the best part of going to Sydney Rowers is travelling there by Rivercat Ferry.

### Our 2023 Christmas Lunch

Regarding lunches, I can announce our Christmas Lunch at the Petersham RSL on Thursday, 30th November 2023. I understand that members would have found last year's expensive. Unfortunately, we were in inflationary times when restaurants started to recover and high food prices after the pandemic. I am not suggesting inflationary times are over.

This year, I am pleased to tell you the lunch will cost \$60 per person (a marked decrease from last year). Lunch will be a three-course meal. The courses are bruschetta, calamari and an arancini ball; the main course is alternate drops of Barramundi or roast Pork and a Christmas pudding with custard for dessert.

You will find more details inside this newsletter. Alan Bassman has asked me to emphasise that if you must pay by cheque, please make your cheque payable to the "Retired Telecommunications Employee Association and, on this occasion, post it to his address. Again, you can find this information inside the newsletter.

I mentioned last month that we have had an outstanding response to this year's trip away to Merimbula. There have been a few hip cups with venue bookings; however, most of this is now behind, and I look forward to having a few days away with many of you.

### September 2023 General Meeting

**Finally, we are back at Petersham RSL for our September 2023 General Meeting. The meeting is on Thursday, 28th September 2023.** The meeting will be over a Zoom Video Conference. The meeting commences at 11.05 a.m.

**The Meeting will have a Special Guest Speaker from the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN). The Guest Speaker will provide an overview of OPAN as well explain the various Government care programmes that allow you to remain in your home.**

I encourage members to come along in person; the food is good at the lounge, and I look forward like other members catching up in person with each other.



## Telecommunications Historical Association NSW (THAN Inc.)



**The Telecommunications Historical Association NSW (THAN Inc) operates the Communications Museum, Sydney.**

**We are located at 12 Kitchener Pde, Bankstown for Heritage Telstra Ltd. The Museum is usually open on a Tuesday and Wednesday from 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m.**

**We are looking for volunteers to assist the Museum in the areas listed below:**

- Administration
- Documents and Procedure Development
- Finance
- Script writer for guided tours
- Photography for cataloguing
- Web development
- Tour guide
- Welder for shelving and crates
- Library
- Research - our library, internet and elsewhere

**If you'd like more information, you're welcome to contact us at [tmuseum@bigpond.net.au](mailto:tmuseum@bigpond.net.au).**

**We'd be delighted to hear from you.**

## RETIRED TELECOMMUNICATIONS EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION Office Bearers

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### Committee

**Trevor Anderson, John Bryce, Allan Fairbairn, Steve Flynn, Bob Hamblion, Vince Haywood, Terry Livingstone, John McAuliffe, Arthur McCarroll, Paul Rewhorn, Barry Robinson, Garry Masman, Ron Milosh, Warren Morley.**





Retired Telecommunications Employees Association

# SEPTEMBER 2023 General Meeting

**Thursday, 28<sup>TH</sup> September 2023**

Meeting Commences at 11.05 am

The September 2023 General Meeting will be held at the **Petersham RSL Club (301 Trafalgar Street, Petersham, an easy 150m walk from Petersham Railway Station).**

While the General Meeting will have Zoom Video coverage, you are encouraged to join with us in person at the Petersham RSL. Petersham RSL has an excellent bistro where you can get together with other members over lunch.

**Special Guest Speaker**

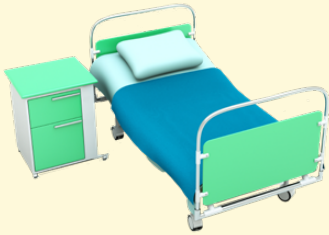
The September 2023 General Meeting will have a Special Guest Speaker from the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN).

The Guest Speaker will provide an overview of OPAN as well explain the various Government care programmes that allow you to remain in your home.



The Meeting will also be held via **ZOOM**

Access details will be emailed to members on Monday afternoon , 25<sup>TH</sup> September 2023



# Welfare News

Peter Hack

I start my welfare report for this month to let you know **Walter Daniels** had a hip operation and, at the time of this report, is in Hornsby Hospital undergoing rehabilitation.

**Warren Croft** had severe flu; however, he is now getting well. **Bob and Carol Hamblion** both have had COVID and are now fully recovered. Bob still has an ear problem.

I spoke with **Helen Wilson**. She tells me she is up to her ears with tradespeople working on her house. I visited **Jim Spencer**; he remains mentally active and enjoys watching the "History Channel". However, he does appear frail and has carers looking after him in his home.

**Mick Byron** is keeping local doctors in comfort with his ongoing skin cancer treatment. **Vince Agostino** has been transferred from the RPA to the Stroke Rehabilitation Centre. **Albert Smith**, a 1957 Technician in Training, is now back home after experiencing a stroke. He doubts whether he will be able to attend any more reunions.

Finally, during my stay in Sydney, I had lunch with **Warren Morley and Cate**. It was good to see them once again. I called Tod Mirgis, who informed me that he and Rhian are both doing well. I have also spoken with **Alan Bassman, John Loudon, Dick Javes and Vince Haywood**.

Well, I am looking forward to the trip away. Congratulations go to John Lane for all his hard work arranging the trip. This trip is not a package tour, so John had to arrange accommodation, buses, meals and visits to local attractions.





# ***RTEA Christmas Lunch***

**12 pm, Thursday,  
30<sup>TH</sup> November 2023**

***This year, our Christmas lunch at the Petersham RSL is an excellent opportunity to catch up with fellow members over a three-course lunch. There will also be lucky door wine prizes. The cost is \$60 (cheaper than last year and more courses).***

**Petersham RSL Club's address is 301 Trafalgar Street, just a 200m easy walk from Petersham Railway Station platform, parallel to the railway.**

**On the Petersham station's concourse, looking towards the City, the club is on your right. Walk towards the pedestrian crossing, cross and then turn right and walk parallel to the railway for about 60m.**

**Please note that there is now a lift at Petersham Station.**

**An electronic payment can be made (see adjacent for bank details details). The cost is \$60 per person. Once you have made your payment, please **remember to text or email John Lane to let him know the number of guests accompanying you to the lunch.****

The preference is for you to pay via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT).

When using EFT, type your surname in the details.

If EFT is unavailable to you, please pay at our General Meeting or post your cheque to Alan Bassman, Treasurer (see page 2 of the newsletter for Alan's address). Also please remember to make the cheque payable to the "Retired Telecommunications Employees Association".

**Great Southern Bank**

**BSB 814-282**

**eSaver Account No: 10642769**







# ROBODEBT: THE NATION'S BIGGEST SCAM

**Since the Royal Commission released its Robo-Debt Report a few months ago, I had planned to write an article on the topic. First, I needed to wade through the Commission's Report and the numerous articles in the media. The Report is over 900 pages long.**

**I am not saying I have read the entire Royal Commission Robo-Debt Report. The Report's introduction and findings sections give a good understanding of the causes and impact on welfare recipients and what needs to change in government, public service and within the community to ensure such a sorry episode never happens again.**

Since 2004, Human Services (Centrelink) has relied on an **Income Matching System (IMS) program**. The IMS programme would match welfare payment data with the *Australian Tax Office (ATO) data*, looking for a mismatch or discrepancy between the two data sets. For example in the case of "Jobseeker", it looked for additional income in one data collection and not in the other.

After comparing the two data collections, the *IMS System* usually find about 300,000 potential data discrepancies within a year. The challenge for Human Services would be to manually investigate the identified discrepancy to confirm the discrepancy and then decide whether to undertake recovery action. If Centrelink believed someone had been overpaid, in most cases, it would communicate with them and allow them to explain or argue their case. Investigating a discrepancy relied primarily on human resources to complete. Centrelink had only sufficient human resources to investigate about 20,000 high-risk discrepancies. It's important to remember that we are discussing potential discrepancies, not actual ones. Later investigation of each of the 20,000 discrepancies would not necessarily show there had been an overpayment, as the RoboDebt debacle would later prove.

Mr Morrison's with his craving for media attention thought otherwise and went further believing that an investigation of all 300,000 discrepancies would in most part be a result of a welfare overpayment. He had no facts to support his assumption, and no public servants would challenge him on his assumption.

With the urging of ministers Scott Morrison and Christian Porter, the government decided to replace the IMS with a computerised system (now known as Robo-Debt) and go after all found discrepancies.

The 2015 budget forecast that the government would recoup \$1.5 billion by automated data matching review of all welfare payments. The plan for Robo-Debt was to use a computer program to auto-match welfare payments with ATO records (based on a flawed averaging calculation) and once it identified a discrepancy, computer-generate debt notices (without human intervention) posted to welfare recipients. The computer-generated debt notices placed the onus on the welfare recipient to disprove the debt. After a period of non payment, private debt collectors were used.

**ANU Professor Whiteford (an authority on the social welfare system) stated, "The government and the public decided to do something unlawful. The government we trust to make and administer the law broke the law".**

**In January 2017, the government boasted it had issued 169,000 notices, and recovered \$300m. The government foreshadowed that Robo-Debt would further roll out to incorporate Aged and Disability pensions.**

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## ROBODEBT: THE NATION'S BIGGEST SCAM (cont'd)

It did not take long before Robo-Debt errors were causing welfare recipients to pay non-existent debts or amounts larger than they owed. The media, advocacy groups, politicians, Unions and individual welfare recipients were levelling allegations against the Scheme. They included:

- Welfare recipients' suicide and self-harm
- The averaging calculation was both incorrect and illegal.
- Debt notices are issued to deceased people.
- Notices issues to disability pensioners
- Debt notices are issued to over 600 vulnerable people.

**The whole sorry ended on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2020, the day before the trial commencement date, the Australian government announced that it had struck a deal with Gordon Legal to settle out-of-court.**

On 11 June 2021, the Federal Court approved a \$1.872 billion settlement, wiping off all remaining debts. **Justice Bernard Murphy described it as a "shameful chapter in the administration of the commonwealth" and "a massive failure of public administration".**

Instead of recouping \$1.5 billion (referring back to the 2015 budget), the Scheme would cost the Australian Taxpayer at least \$2.5 billion and, most

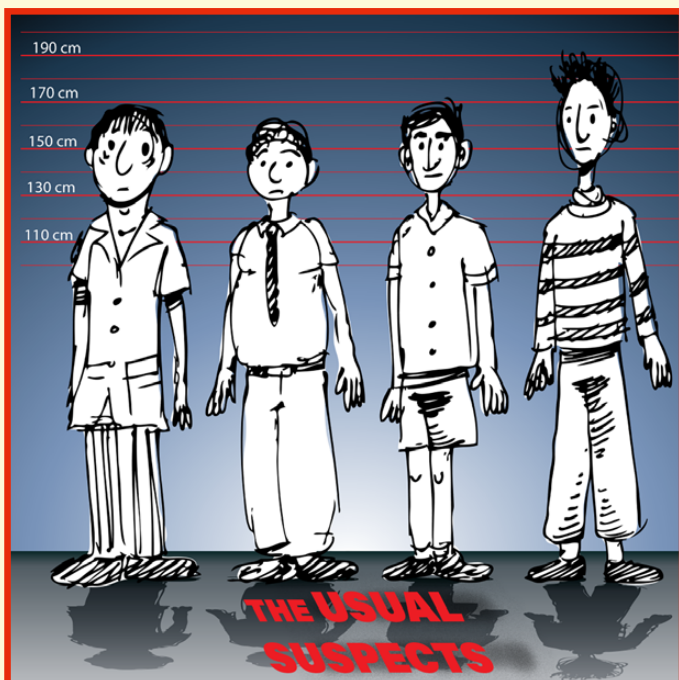
importantly, cause distress, self-harm and suicides for the most vulnerable people in our community.

The government did everything possible to prevent the Robo-Debt scheme from being raised in parliament. The deception was not confined to parliament; the **former prime minister Morrison, the social services minister at the time, allowed the misleading of cabinet over the Scheme's legality. The Royal Commission report found that a stated need for legislative change to implement the Scheme disappeared from a policy document prepared by bureaucrats that he took the Scheme to the cabinet.**

There was Christian Porter, Stuart Robert, and Alan Tudge. The ministers mentioned here are infamous for other actions inside and outside their ministerial positions. When I recall these ministers and the attention they have attracted over their careers as ministers, I recall the poster from the movie "Usual Suspects".

**They all have denied and expressed outrage with the Royal Commission's findings.** There you have it, a brief description of Robo-Debt and how it came into existence; I could have given a longer explanation, particularly how flawed was the "averaging" calculation and, worse, how Morrison and other government ministers knew from the outset, that their Scheme had deep flaws. Yet they decided to go ahead and cover up regardless. They deceived parliament, the cabinet and welfare recipients, ruining many peoples lives.

**As Peter Hartcher puts it in his article (6th July 2023 in the Sydney Morning Herald – SMH): "even more staggering, it was not a slip-up, quickly corrected, but a travesty of lawbreaking and deceit covered up for four years.**



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## ROBODEBT: THE NATION'S BIGGEST SCAM (cont'd)

### Robo-Debt Royal Commission

Catherine Holmes AC SC was the appointed Royal Commissioner into the Robo-Debt Scheme. She delivered her Report to the Governor-General on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

You do not have to go far into the Report to find what the Commissioner found. In fact, in the first two paragraphs, you see the dismay on the part of the Commissioner as to how breathtaking the extent to which the previous Coalition would prevent any attempt to hinder the Robo-Debt Scheme's continuance.

The Commissioner found that there was little interest on the part of the previous federal coalition government to ensure the Robo-Debt Scheme's legality throughout its rushed implementation, with little thought to how it would affect welfare recipients and the extent to which public servants obliged ministers on their quest for savings.

The Commissioner was also equally dishearten with the ineffectiveness of what one might consider institutional checks and balances

- the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office,
- the Office of Legal Services Coordination,
- the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner,
- and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal – in presenting any hindrance to the Scheme's continuance.

As I have mentioned, the Robo-Debt Royal Commission Report had no reservations in finding the Robo-Debt Scheme illegal. Commissioner Holmes has included a sealed section of the Report that recommends the referral of several former government ministers and public servants to the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC). It is telling that the Commissioner asked for the delay of the Report's release until the federal parliament has legislated for an NCACC. The Commissioner apparently wants some ministers and public servants to be accountable for their role in the Robo-Debt scandal.

### Social Attitudes

Before I end this article, I want to mention a particular finding in the Report that should concern and where there needs to be change for the Australian community.

In part, the former government successfully pushed forward with the Robo-Debt Scheme, which relied on the social attitudes within the Australian community towards people living on welfare payments.

The Commissioner stated that *anti-welfare rhetoric is easy populism useful for campaign purposes. It is neither recent nor confined to one side of politics.*

I agree with the Commissioner; politicians have fostered this social attitude over the years. They suggest that welfare recipients game the system and, about jobseekers, tell us that many in their ranks are dole-bludgers. The unfavourable social attitudes have filtered widely throughout the community. It is simply a distraction, allowing politicians to avoid for a long time, not doing anything meaningful in dealing with issues around welfare. Little has occur to retrain people as technology changes the workplace. In fact TAFE and other institutions have had funding cuts.

Welfare recipients have been allowed to live well below the poverty line and continually subject to stringent requirements to qualify and continue with welfare assistance.

Today, we have a circumstance where Robo-Debt has cost the taxpayer at least \$2.5 billion; money that could have gone to training and made life fairer for welfare recipients.

The Commissioner found that politicians need to change social attitudes toward people receiving welfare payments. **The evidence before the Royal Commission was that fraud in the welfare system was minuscule, but that is not the impression one would get from what ministers responsible for social security payments have said over the years.**





# YO-HO-HO!!

The Silly Season has rolled around again, and it is time to have a couple of drinks with some old workmates.

\* This year the Country Installation Office Party will be conducted as follows:-

Merry  
Christmas  
— & —  
HAPPY NEW YEAR

At:- Crystal Palace Hotel  
On:- 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023  
When:- 1200 for 1230hrs

Peter Clarke 0419 394 349  
Email:- hipshot@bigpond.com

APPRENTICE TECHNICIAN,  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS

CLASSES  
★ ★ OF ★ ★  
1984  
(ATT)

I am Greig Sheridan who is trying to contact the 72 ATTS (Apprentice Technicians, Telecommunications) who commenced at North Strathfield on the 31<sup>ST</sup> of January 1984 for a 40<sup>TH</sup> Year reunion in February 2024.

At the moment, we're still in the discovery phase. However, we have marked **Saturday, 3<sup>RD</sup> of February 2024**, as the most likely date for a catch-up to be held somewhere in Sydney.

We are using a Facebook group: (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/attjanuary1984/>) as our primary contact means, and I am also maintaining a separate e-mail list of those who don't use Facebook.

We are also looking for instructors who taught us across North Strathfield, Rhodes and North Sydney training schools.

For more information or if you would like to make contact, you can reach Greig Sheridan on 0402 033 044 or email [gs@gisyd.com](mailto:gs@gisyd.com).



### RETIRED MEMBERS ASSOCIATION: APPLICATION FORM

Step 1 - Application	
First Name	Last Name
Spouse/Partner Name <i>(the Retired Members Association has regular social functions to which Spouses and Partners are welcomed).</i>	Date of Birth (Optional). <i>You may wish to only provide year and/ or month of your birth details.</i>
Address (First Line)	Suburb/Town/City
Address (Second Line)	Postcode <input type="text"/> State <input type="text"/>
Contact Phone Number	Monthly Newsletter Preference (Except December and January) Email <input type="checkbox"/> Post <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>
Email Address	
I would like to purchase a name badge at \$15 (includes postage). Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Name on Badge

### Step 2 – Work History

Brief Description of your work history in Telecommunications Industry

### Step 3 – Payment

A membership payment together with postal edition of the newsletter and badge payments (only if later two items are applicable) can be made by posting a cheque to the Secretary, or via electronic transfer.

**Cheque payments are payable to CWU Retired Members Association and post to:**

Secretary, CWU Retired Members Association  
22 Cameron Avenue,  
Baulkham Hills  
NSW 2153

**Bank Transfers (electronic payments)**  
Great Southern Bank  
**BSB 814-282,**  
**eSaver Account No: 10642769.**

Please include your surname on the electronic payment reference.

**Payments preferences are:**

- Membership plus free Newsletter via email \$20**   
(Note this is a once only membership payment)
- Membership plus the current year’s Newsletter via Post \$35**
- Membership plus Name Badge \$35**
- Membership plus Name Badge plus the current year’s Newsletter \$50**

I wish to apply for membership of the Retired Members Association. I understand that by completing this application form and making payment, I agree to abide by the constitution of the Association. Please tick if you agree.

You can read and download (pdf) the Retired Members Association’s constitution at: <http://www.cwuretired.org/docs/CONSTITUTION.pdf>