



CANEGROWERS



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Time for warring parties to get out of the way in mill pay dispute

CANEGROWERS is calling on Wilmar Sugar and unions representing mill workers to prove they are serious about resolving their long-running pay dispute by getting out of the way and letting the independent umpire decide a fair and reasonable outcome.

After many months of fruitless and increasingly bitter negotiations, it's time for both parties to step aside and let the Fair Work Commission decide, CANEGROWERS Chairman Owen Menkens said.

"It's clear that the parties involved are either unable or reluctant to reach an agreement, despite the damage it's doing to farming families, the sugarcane industry, or their own communities," Mr Menkens said.

"We have said repeatedly that workers deserve to be represented and achieve a fair pay deal and milling companies must be financially viable. But this dispute has become increasingly hostile and there is no sign of a compromise on the horizon.

"CANEGROWERS has taken strong action already. Our representatives have had several meetings with Wilmar officials and union senior officials. The response to these discussions has been parlous with rumour, inconsistent communication and often misinformation infecting the confidence of the whole industry and hurting people in the community.

"Enough is enough we have written again to Wilmar and the unions' leadership, calling on them to apply to the Fair Work Commission to commence an arbitration process so that the strikes can stop and a deal can be struck so that farmers and contractors can have certainty.

"What we're saying is, you've had your chance to reach a compromise acceptable to both sides and you've failed. This can't continue indefinitely. It's impacting the harvest, it's impacting growers and contractors, it's impacting families, it's impacting the industry, and it's impacting communities.

"It's time to admit you've reached an intractable stalemate, step aside and let an independent third party decide the issue."

"The Fair Work Commission exists and has the ability to step in and arbitrate in such circumstances and that is clearly what has to happen now. Even then that process will take some time and a resolution is needed NOW, so stop the bickering and make a deal.

"The current rolling stoppages at Wilmar mills, which crush about fifty percent of Queensland's sugarcane, have already cost growers and contractors dearly, not just financially but also in terms of the stress and anxiety they're experiencing.

"It's already a difficult season, and if we're to have any chance of success we need to start pulling in the same direction, working together to make up ground, not continuing to be hampered by strike action.

"For everyone's sake, either do a deal now, or engage the Fair Work Commission, let them resolve the issue that you are clearly unable to. Let's get this crop off and try to make the 2024 season a success."