

BlueScope workers on strike at Melbourne plant

Mark Skulley

BlueScope Steel has been notified of an indefinite strike at a small but strategic steel processing and distribution centre in Victoria.

The National Union of Workers said more than 80 of its members at the operation at Westall in Melbourne's south-east were on strike over a "substandard" pay offer.

Tim Kennedy, secretary of the NUW Victoria, said workers agreed to the indefinite strike after talks with management on a new enterprise agreement stalled.

He said workers and the union were trying to maintain pay parity between the two big steel distributors, BlueScope and OneSteel, but BlueScope's offer was "well below rates offered by other companies in the sector".

"Workers doing the same work should get the same pay," Mr Kennedy said.

The Westall workers were currently paid \$888 a week and had been of-

fered a 3 per cent rise but were seeking an increase of slightly more than 4 per cent, lifting their weekly pay to \$915.

Mr Kennedy said BlueScope had offered a one-off bonus, but workers wanted an increase to their base pay that flowed through to superannuation and penalty rates.

BlueScope spokesman Michael Reay said the company was at an "advanced stage of negotiations and working towards a sensible resolution" but the company did not comment on the specifics of such discussions.

The Westall site is a major distribution centre which supplies steel for major construction projects.

The NUW claimed work on the Victorian government's \$3.2 billion desalination plant at Wonthaggi would be disrupted by the action as steel "will not be processed and distributed in the usual way".

It is understood the plant supplies steel to a fabrication company which then supplies some product to the desalination project.