

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2020

I hope you are all faring well now that semester is in full swing.

A little update about the parking situation.

We put the matter of changes to parking on the agenda of the most recent Academic Consultative Committee (ACC) meeting, on Thursday 27th of February. (ACC is an Enterprise Agreement (EBA) mandated committee chaired by the SDVC, for the purpose of facilitating consultation between the Executive and Academic Employees on workplace relations and human resource matters. While parking conditions are not explicitly stated in the EBA, it has been successfully argued at the Fair Work Commission that parking conditions are an implied right, particularly in the case where the parking conditions have been maintained with little change over many years.) Surprisingly, in the ACC meeting, neither the SDVC nor the Director of HR had any concrete information whatsoever on proposed changes to parking. While the SDVC admitted that he had recently *heard* that the reason permits had been issued only until July (unlike in previous years) may have been to do with a proposal to automate the parking system, he certainly was *not in a position* to give us any firm information about whether that was in fact the case. In fairness, given that he is busy leading UWA's response to the rapidly developing COVID-19 situation, this is not entirely surprising.

Interestingly, unlike the Academic Staff, members of the Student Guild *had* been informally briefed by someone from Campus Management earlier in the year about some of the plans for changes to parking. Oh what a tangled web we weave...

As you can imagine, it felt to members of ACC like we may have been stonewalled, and we weren't thrilled by the experience. After some phone calls, we managed to set up a meeting between NTEU reps, HR and the Chief Operating Officer (COO), and a friendly chat between the COO and yours truly. So, here is the latest intel on proposed changes to parking.

A proposal to automate the carparks from the middle of the year is in development. This automation would involve something like number plate recognition administered through an app, provided and run by everyone's favourite parking and security company, Wilson. In our discussion, the COO assured me that no other changes were part of the proposal, no increase to fees and no net increase to users in the system. One minor—very minor—change (hardly worth mentioning) would be that there would no longer be gazetted areas for staff, students and visitors but, given that there would be no change to the total number of users in the system, I was assured that this could have no effect on the availability of bays for the different constituencies trying to access parking. Assured I may have been, reassured I was not.

One significant benefit of the new system, according to the COO, is that it will be **pay-per-use**, so you won't have to pay for parking when you're on leave, or working for home or, in fact, on those days when you just can't find a parking spot anywhere on the entire campus (which I think we can all confidently expect will be even more common under the above conditions). It is not unreasonable to hypothesize that the prospect of paying for a permit and not finding a parking place might have already removed some people from the "permitted" population, whereas knowing that you are paying only if you find an open bay may, in fact, increase those searching for spaces.

So much for the proposal. What about the consultation with staff? Well here we have, yet another, situation where those pesky staff got wind of a fairly well advanced proposal before the beginning of the 'consultation' process. Offering voluntary redundancies in Campus Management at the end of last year, then issuing permits for only 6 months, then announcing that parking *would be* automated from July may have been a bit of a give-away—it's hard to say. But as often seems to be the case, the cat managed to get out of the bag.

But really, you ask, what about the consultation with staff?? Oh, well that's coming but only when the proposal has been fully developed (you know how it works by now, right?). Just in case you have been hiding under a rock, I'll give you the précis version. *"Here's is a fully worked up proposal to outsource the automation of parking at UWA to Wilson parking, no other major changes involved except that there will **no longer be designated staff and student bays**, and you'll be providing detailed daily information about your movements to a third-party multinational corporation that you might have reason to be suspicious of (more on that below). We'd love to hear your detailed opinions on this. Please send them to this email address bottomless.pit@uwa.edu.au." And subsequently, "Thanks for your input, we received a range of response, most of them negative but luckily all of the negative responses were merely opinions. In contrast, the three responses in favour of the proposal were extremely well reasoned and on the strength of those we have decided to implement the plan without change."*

I jest, of course. What kind of an institution would behave like that?

According to communication from the COO, the proposal is still being worked up and there will be ample opportunity for staff and students to be consulted on any proposed changes, as nothing has been decided yet. The COO has assured me that no contract with Wilson Parking has been signed—there is no Memorandum of Understanding, there is no Heads of Agreement—between UWA and Wilson. The COO also asserted that the proposal for automation can't go out to tender as Wilson is the only possible provider. So, for some unstated reason, there is no company in the entire country, other than Wilson, that could be considered as a potential provider of the required automated parking solution. Furthermore, Wilson definitely have not interviewed and employed a Parking Operations Manager at UWA with an April start date, and Wilson is definitely not currently advertising on SEEK.com, on behalf of an unnamed vendor, parking positions in the CBD/Inner/Western Suburb for a July start date.

One of the reasons we know that none of these things have happened is because the University's [procurement policy](#) makes it quite clear that any contract with a value in excess of \$250,000—which this would surely have been—requires a tender process along with a written procurement strategy and recommendation report, and any exemption from this tender process requires a [tender waiver](#) to be completed with sign off by an appropriate financial delegate within the University. It would be completely preposterous to suggest that a procurement strategy or tender waiver could have been developed and authorised for something as significant as campus parking without the knowledge of the SDVC; hence, we must conclude that these things have indeed not happened.

So, nothing to see here really and no reason at all to be concerned that UWA is getting into bed with a company that some uncharitable people might be inclined to call one of the most rapacious in the country. In fact, you might be surprised to find out that, notwithstanding the extortionate fees that

Wilson is known for charging in many of its other car-parks, the margins on management of car-parks are incredibly (as in: *not credibly*) thin. So thin, in fact, that we might need to consider being grateful to Wilson for even taking on our parking contract. In the wake of Wilson Parking's embroilment in the Panama Papers scandal, UNSW Academic Jeff Knapp, did some investigation on Wilson and found that while they enjoy revenue in the billions, they manage to only scrape by on an average profit margin of around 5% or less before tax. So, managing parking seems hardly more profitable than leaving your assets in term deposit. But not so fast, while Wilson Parking managed to make \$5.1 billion in revenue over 14 years, they struggled to meet their reporting obligations under the Corporations Act submitting annual reports late for 18 years, paying a mere \$83.7 million in tax over the 14 years period. It might also be considered odious to mention that the parent company that owns Wilson Parking also own the company that holds the contracts for running the off-shore detention centres at Nauru and Manus (<https://www.smh.com.au/business/wilson-parkings-tax-numbers-appear-to-defy-economic-reality-20160408-go1w4u.html>).

All that aside, I am confident that you will all be reassured to know that we definitely haven't signed a contract for the automation of parking at UWA, certainly not with Wilson, and certainly not before the University community has been widely engaged in a transparent consultation done in good faith.

I think most of us would be happy to acknowledge that the parking situation at UWA is currently sub-optimal and does need to be improved, and I think we would all welcome the instigation of a broad-based conversation about the burning issues.

As usual, feel free to pass this onto colleagues who are not members of the UWA ASA, but make sure that you encourage them to join us.