



CEO says editorial quality maintained

Publication: The Age

Publication date: 30-8-2008

An industrial dispute between Fairfax Media and its journalists escalated yesterday, with reporters picketing sites and a high-profile columnist sacked.

Staff in Melbourne and NSW walked off the job on Thursday over job cuts and pay negotiations.

The action follows the announcement earlier this week that Fairfax would slash 550 jobs, saving the company \$50 million.

Staff at The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, the Illawarra Mercury and The Newcastle Herald picketed outside their offices.

The workers are on strike until Monday.

Mr Kirk said senior staff and employees contractually exempt from industrial action were compiling newspapers. The production of The Age and The Sunday Age would not be affected. The strike action was unprotected and illegal, Mr Kirk said, and the company reserved its right to take action.

Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance spokesman Mike Dobbie said the Melbourne rally was in protest against the "low-cost, low-quality journalism that Fairfax management wishes to impose". But Mr Kirk denied the job cuts would affect the quality of the group's reporting.

Just over 100 jobs would go across Sydney and Melbourne editorial departments, but would largely affect sub-editing positions on advertising and lifestyle supplements.

Mr Kirk said that local, international, business and sport news would not be affected. "It's quite mischievous of people to say that there's going to be a decline in the quality."

Mr Kirk said Fairfax's offer to employees of salary increases of between 11% and 12.25% over three years, depending on experience, was at the upper end of salaries paid by Australian and international media companies. Senior journalists earning over \$108,000 would receive pay rises on merit, he said.



Although the company reported a net profit of \$386.9 million for 2007-08, Mr Kirk said The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald had a significant decline in earnings in that period of about 9%, or \$17 million.

"That sort of decline needs to be addressed," he said.