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Nurses to fight loss of leave

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PUBLIC-sector nurses are furious after a surprise move by the State Government to strip them of 11 days' annual leave.

Australian Nursing Federation state secretary Neroli Ellis said shift-work nurses had enjoyed the 11½ days' leave in lieu of working on public holidays for 30 years.

Ms Ellis said the Government had sprung the measure on nurses as part of an appeal against a Tasmanian Industrial Commission ruling on a different matter.

That ruling, last October, forced the Government to pay penalties to shift-workers on public holidays.

The full bench of the Industrial Commission is considering the Government's appeal, heard on Monday and Tuesday.



SHIFT SHOCK:
Neroli Ellis.

The appeal included a proposal by Health Minister Michelle O'Byrne to continue paying double time to shift-workers working on public holidays, but to allow the employer, not the employee, to decide if double time is paid or time in lieu is taken.

Ms Ellis said the Government had brought a legal team from Melbourne and Sydney to battle against the nurses.

"The timing could not be worse as nurses are in the middle of negotiations for a new enterprise agreement," she said.

"To remove 11 days of annual leave from shift-working nurses will be

the last straw for many hard-working nurses."

Ms Ellis said the Health Minister had argued that shift-workers should only have a day added to their annual leave for each public holiday falling during their annual leave.

"Nurses see this as a clear sign that the Government does not value their contribution and this will do nothing to help recruitment and retention of nurses in the Tasmanian public sector," she said.

"It is outrageous that the Government are trying to remove nurses' conditions at a time when they are stretched to the brink by the huge health demands of our ageing society."

A spokesman for Ms O'Byrne said she would wait until the commission had considered the appeal before commenting.