

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR)
Ministry Employee Relations Committee (MERC)
Terms of Reference

Purpose

The parties recognize the value of discussing issues of mutual interest to achieve understanding and where required, resolution and thus enhance the relationship between Management, the Union and the Employees. It is understood that resolutions reached at these meetings shall respect the rights and entitlements contained in the OPSEU Unified Collective Agreement.

The following are mutual objectives:

- a) to strive to maintain and foster a positive work environment which promotes satisfactory working conditions and terms of employment for all employees who are subject to this TOR;
- b) to enhance communication between the parties and to promote constructive and harmonious relations;
- c) to promote a climate of mutual respect, trust and integrity;
- d) to provide a forum for discussion of issues and concerns of mutual interest and potential resolutions, of staff who are in the bargaining unit at the Local and Ministry level.

Duties and Scope of Committee

- The Committee shall discuss issues that have been referred from the workplace level that have been discussed at that level but have not been resolved or have Ministry wide implications that cannot be addressed at that level.
- Items may be discussed by the parties in between/prior to the next scheduled Committee meeting, to allow for proper preparation in advance of the meeting.
- Items may be tabled at the meeting itself, but only for the purpose of being scheduled for discussion at a subsequent meeting, unless otherwise agreed to by the parties.
- The Committee may refer to the Central Employee Relations Committee (CERC) items that have been discussed at this level but remain unresolved. The Parties

agree that while items are at the CERC level, they will be held in abeyance at the MERC level.

- It is agreed that the following items will not be subject for discussion at the MERC:
 - a) Any matter which may involve amendments to legislation or regulations, or which may lead to the amendment or withdrawal of any directive of Service-wide application.
 - b) Any matter which may require amendment, alteration, addition or deletion to any part of the Collective Agreement. For greater clarity, any matter which might more properly be the subject of collective bargaining or is the subject of negotiations for the renewal of the Collective Agreement between the parties.
 - c) Any matter which requires Central Agency or Public Service Commission approval.
 - d) Any matter which is the subject of an individual, group, or union grievance, investigation, or WDHP complaint, unless the parties mutually agree otherwise.
 - e) Any matter involving a criminal offence.

Composition

- The Committee will consist of the following representatives: up to five (5) Management representatives and up to four (4) members from the Union (OPSEU) and one (1) OPSEU staff representative.
- Other resources may join a meeting to discuss a particular item on the agenda, as agreed to by the parties.
- Each party will appoint a Co-Chair for the Committee.
- Quorum is defined as a minimum of two Committee Members from both Management and the Union. Absence of a member of the Committee does not require cancellation of a meeting.
- Delegates are not permitted.

Meeting Protocols

The Committee shall have Co-Chairs, one from Management and one from the Union who will ensure the following:

- a) The scheduling of meetings.

- b) Development and circulation of the agenda ten (10) working days ahead of the scheduled meeting, or as soon as possible in advance of the meeting.
- c) Preparation, completion and the circulation of meeting minutes to the parties within one (1) working day from the date of the meeting, or as otherwise agreed to. Minutes shall be signed by the Co-Chairs who authorize them for distribution. Approved minutes will be posted on the Ministry's intranet and on the Union's website within a reasonable time.
 - o Meeting minutes shall remain available, unless otherwise agreed to by both parties for confidentiality reasons. To encourage a full and open discussion of issues and promote a collaborative resolution process, the details of all discussions taking place at Committee meetings shall remain confidential except as provided by the minutes, or otherwise specifically agreed by both parties. To maintain confidentiality, names will not be used in the minutes.
- d) Alternate as Chairs of each meeting. It shall be the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that discussion proceeds in an efficient manner that allows full discussion of the views of the members in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.

Guests/Observers

- Either party may invite one or more persons as a guest to provide expertise and advice on specific items, or to act as observers or trainees, provided that prior agreement of the other party is obtained. The role of the guest should be made clear to the party from whom permission is sought and to the guest. Guests/observers should not participate in the substantive discussion at the meetings.
- Participation by additional persons shall not be unreasonably denied by either party, and guests are to be reminded of confidentiality protocols. If the other person(s)/guest is an OPSEU employee of the Ministry, they will be granted unpaid leave with no loss of benefits or credits, where operationally feasible.

Frequency of Meetings

- Meetings will be scheduled up to four (4) times per year.
- Scheduled meetings for the upcoming year to be scheduled following the last meeting of the current year.
- Meetings will be kept to a maximum five (5) hours.

Time Off for MERC related duties

- Union members of the Committee shall be released from duty without loss of pay or credits for the purpose of attending meetings and or MERC training.
- Leave of absence without loss of pay or credits, not to exceed one day, shall be granted to the Union members for the purpose of travel/caucus time for scheduled MERC meetings.
- Notwithstanding the foregoing, where any of the Union members require additional leave due to excessive distance to be travelled or extenuating circumstances, the Ministry shall not unreasonably deny the request. Requests for time off to attend/travel to MERC meetings should be made at least one (1) month in advance of the scheduled meeting, or as soon as reasonably possible.
- Travelling and other expenses (i.e., lodging and meals) incurred by the Union members will be borne by the Union.

Term

- This TOR shall be in effect for one (1) year, from date signed.
- Either party may give notice of its desire to renegotiate the TOR in writing, at least thirty (30) days prior to the expiration date or closest scheduled MERC meeting to the expiration date.

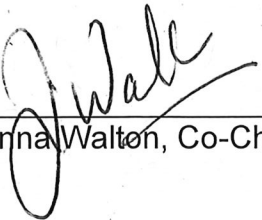
MERC Sub-Committee(s)

- The parties recognize the importance of utilizing a sub-committee, where agreed to, to discuss challenging and complex concerns of mutual interest which are better suited for discussion outside of the Committee table.
- The parties, with agreement, may choose to expand or collapse sub-committee membership.
- The MERC TOR will apply to MERC sub-committee(s).
- The parties will agree at each meeting what communication will be provided to management and employees following the meeting.

Signatures

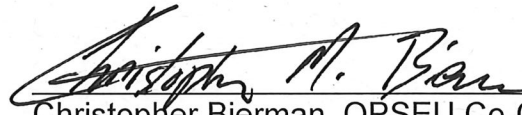
Dated this 28th day of September, 2023

For the Ministry of Natural Resources and
Forestry:



Donna Walton, Co-Chair, MNRF

For the Ontario Public Service Employees
Union:



Christopher Bierman, OPSEU Co-Chair

