



## MERAS UPDATE

August 2022



## MERAS members to celebrate 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

MERAS is 20 years old next week. The union was registered on 23 August 2002. On Tuesday we are encouraging members to share lunch, morning or afternoon tea at your workplaces.

MERAS is the only union dedicated to representing midwives. We are a member-driven, democratic union – “by midwives, for midwives”.

MERAS was established by the NZ College of Midwives as a separate but associated organisation. Our first General Secretary was Bernard McIlhone who had extensive union experience.

On Bernard’s sudden passing in 2017, Caroline Conroy, who had worked for MERAS with Bernard since 2009, took on the leadership role and was joined the following year by Jill Ovens who brought industrial expertise as leader of E tū public and health services.

MERAS has grown rapidly in the last few years and today around 90% of midwives employed by Te Whatu Ora belong to MERAS. Along with other midwives employed by non-DHB maternity hospitals and units, MERAS members provide a strong collective voice on workplace issues with more than 100 workplace reps.

Two years ago, we appointed our first organiser, Karen Gray, who is South Island-based. We are now advertising for another organiser who will be based in the North Island.

The Collective Agreements negotiated by MERAS with employers ensure best practice terms and conditions of employment for midwives, as well as protecting professional midwifery standards.

We represent members in their employment issues and support the professional needs of employed midwives, encouraging opportunities for career progression and midwifery leadership.

MERAS is recognised in the health sector and by the wider community as the voice for employed midwives, ensuring the role of midwives is recognised and valued.

### Winter incentive payments implemented

Additional payments for night shifts and extra shifts have been approved nationally and should by now have been implemented throughout Te Whatu Ora.

These payments **do not** apply where maternity incentives such as double time shifts were already in place as of 1 July.



**SECRET DEAL:** The Employment Relations Authority has found that MERAS members employed by Te Papaioea were wrongly kept in the dark when Mid Central DHB took over the primary birthing unit in December 2019. Five of the midwives have been awarded at least \$5000 for unjustifiable dismissal and four have also been awarded four weeks’ pay in lieu of notice.

### Negotiations underway for cost-of-living increase across the public sector

Jill Ovens is involved in negotiations for a cost of living pay increase which, if successful, will be delivered across the entire public service, including education and health.

The pay adjustment is proving to be hugely ambitious given the scale and complexity of the entire Public Service system with discussion about which organisations are “in”. There is no debate about directly-employed staff covered by collective agreements in public service agencies. Te Whatu Ora is also expected to sign up.

The unions are arguing for inclusion of private sector organisations that receive government funding to deliver public services. We have supplied a list of those private maternity units where we have collective agreements.

### Farewell - Margret Norris

It was with sadness that MERAS was advised that Marg Norris had passed away last week after a short illness. Caroline Conroy had known Marg for many years in her various midwifery roles, including Director of Midwifery at Bay of Plenty and more recently in her midwifery role at Whakatane where she was also one of two MERAS workplace reps. Haere rā, wāhine toa. We will miss you.

**Caroline Conroy MERAS Co-Leader (Midwifery)**

**Jill Ovens MERAS Co-Leader (Industrial)**