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98% of Australia's actors vote to strike

Australian actors will strike on offshore television commercials if a deal with producers is not reached by August 7.

An overwhelming majority of Actors' Equity members voted in favour of strike action after the Screen Producers' Association of Australia (SPAA) suddenly terminated the *Offshore Commercials Agreement* last month.

The *Offshore Commercials Agreement* is a joint Equity/SPAA contract that sets the rates of pay and conditions for performers' work on television commercials that are shot in Australia but screened overseas.

"We are extremely disappointed it has come to this," said Equity federal president Simon Burke.

"Strike action is never something we take lightly, but we have been left with little choice,"

SPAA terminated the *Equity/SPAA Offshore Commercials Agreement* on June 23, effective August 7. Equity repeatedly contacted SPAA requesting a meeting to negotiate a new agreement before issuing strike ballots.

"I am pleased with the strong mandate our members have given Equity to confront SPAA on this issue," said Burke.

Members of Actors' Equity Australia were mailed ballots on Friday July 3 asking "Do you agree that Equity members should strike on all offshore television commercials to be produced on or after 7 Aug 2009 unless Equity is able to negotiate an agreement with the producers to cover this work prior to that date?". Votes closed on Thursday, July 23 at 5pm.

"I have personally contacted SPAA and several producers since the agreement was terminated requesting meetings at which we could attempt to reach a new agreement. So far not one single producer has been willing to do so," said Equity national director Simon Whipp.

"We remain hopeful that negotiations between Equity and SPAA can occur, but the August 7 deadline imposed by SPAA is fast approaching."

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