

The pay-off: rise of the fluoro leaves white-collar workers feeling blue

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COLIN MURTY

Tree-lopper Trevor Harrison, from Bundaberg in Queensland, is training in Perth for deployment in WA's mining regions

TONY BARRASS

MEET our new elite worker — the fluoro-collar — who has for the first time helped Australia's blue-collar workers to beat their white-collar counterparts in bringing home the bacon.

In research out today that highlights fundamental economic changes under way, workers such as Trevor Harrison, 24, a tree-lopper and landscape gardener, have emerged as the 21st

century's powerhouse employees. For the first time, those with traditionally lower-paid physical jobs are earning on average \$144 a week more than the professional staff and clerks, with manual workers dominating six of the nation's top 10 highest-paid industries.

Debunking long-held notions that success in life comes only with a university degree, the report reveals a disturbing earnings gap between the top three male-heavy jobs such as mining, work-

ing for a utility and financial services (still mainly white-collar), and the bottom three female-dominated industries: the arts, hospitality and retail.

The inaugural Suncorp Bank wages report shows that while mine workers in Western Australia on average earn about \$159,000 a year, and enjoyed one of the biggest jumps in pay across all job categories in the past 15 years thanks to the resources boom, Canberrans are still at the top of the earnings pile when

compared with workers in other states and territories.

That would change, the report predicts, with big-earning fluoro-collar workers connected to the mining industry pushing either Western Australia or the Northern Territory to the top of the average weekly wage scale. NSW had the lowest wages growth in the nation.

Jobs that are described as "low-
Continued on Page 2

MORE REPORTS P2

Optus kept cuts quiet, says union

OPTUS has blindsided staff with its plan to axe 750 jobs as it strives to beef up profits, workers say.

A union claims it had been kept in the dark over the move, despite ongoing discussions with Optus about the telco's drive for efficiency.

Australia's second-biggest telco yesterday announced it was axing the jobs, targeting "operational,

Jeff Whalley

back office and administrative" areas. Optus has not revealed how many of the jobs will go in Victoria.

About two-thirds will be cut from the group's Sydney base, while the rest will come from Victoria, Queensland, Canberra and South Australia.

Communication Workers Union secretary Len Cooper

said Optus had not flagged the job cuts, during discussions with union representatives.

"We think this is a very shortsighted position they are taking here," Mr Cooper said. He said the cuts were taking place as the union prepared to start enterprise bargaining agreements next month.

"Our main concern is Optus and Telstra are cut-

ting jobs as they move into the NBN when they are actually going to need these skilled staff," he said.

Optus has said workers in senior and middle management will be included in the jobs cull. A majority of those workers will be made redundant in the next two months. The rest will be cut in the second half of the year.

**Veteline, Page 26
BusinessDaily, Page 51**

Inmate drank his urine

AN American college student forgotten by drug police in a holding cell for five days without food, water or access to a toilet says he drank his own urine to survive.

Daniel Chong also said he broke his glasses and tried to use a shard to scratch "Sorry Mom" into his arm. The university student, 24, was swept up

with eight others in a San Diego drug raid that netted drugs and arms.

Mr Chong said Drug Enforcement Administration agents told him he would be let go. But he was returned to a holding cell to await release.

Police said he was accidentally left there.

Forget uni, if you want to make a buck ...

Throw on a fluoro money vest

Phillip Hudson
national political editor

THE fluoro vest is the new pinstripe suit, with the average blue-collar worker earning \$144 a week more than a typical white-collar employee.

A report by Suncorp Bank says six of the top 10 highest-paid industries are dominated by the once-derided sector.

The study, to be released today, is based on Bureau of Statistics figures. It found the average blue-collar worker earns \$1229 a week compared with \$1085 for those in a traditional white-collar job.

Suncorp executive manager Tony Meredith said blue-collar workers "are the new elite of the Australian economy". "This report debunks the commonly held belief that Australians no longer make things and suggests you don't need a university degree to make it in Australia today," Mr Meredith said.

The report said the fluorescent safety vest, a characteristic of mining and construction sites, symbolised the domination of the blue-collar workforce.

Mining workers — dubbed "fluoro-collar workers" — were the top earners with an average wage of \$2173. Their wage has risen by 102 per cent during the past 15 years. At the bottom of the wage scale were hospitality workers, with those working as bartenders and waiters earning a typical wage of \$498 a week.

Since 1996 their pay rise has been 49 per cent.

The three highest-paid industries were the male-dominated mining, utilities and financial services, while the three lowest paid were those with a higher number of female workers, such as hospitality, arts and retail.

The report said Victoria had the biggest wage gap between men and women's pay of \$427, mainly because it has a bigger share of women working part time.

Editorial, Page 28



Average weekly wage by industry, and % change since 1996

Doing well: Jake Teusner, 28, has a concreting business. Picture: DARREN TINDALE

| Rank | Industry | Collar | Nov '11 | Change |
|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|
| 1 | Mining | Blue | \$2172.90 | 102% |
| 2 | Utilities | Blue | \$1596.90 | 117% |
| 3 | Financial services | Blue | \$1374.60 | 88% |
| 4 | Media & telecommunications | Blue | \$1365.20 | 113% |
| 5 | Scientific services | Blue | \$1353.40 | 109% |
| 6 | Construction | Blue | \$1307.20 | 85% |
| 7 | Public safety | Blue | \$1269.90 | 86% |
| 8 | Wholesale trade | Blue | \$1252.40 | 108% |
| 9 | Transport & warehousing | Blue | \$1219.10 | 60% |
| 10 | Manufacturing | Blue | \$1144.50 | 81% |
| 11 | Real estate services | Blue | \$998.60 | 94% |
| 12 | Education & training | Blue | \$985.40 | 71% |
| 13 | Healthcare & social services | Blue | \$898.90 | 78% |
| 14 | Administration | Blue | \$848.30 | 67% |
| 15 | Arts | Blue | \$689 | 70% |
| 16 | Retail | Blue | \$624.30 | 77% |
| 17 | Hospitality | Blue | \$497.70 | 49% |

Total (average) **\$1229** 86%

Total (average) **\$1085** 90%

Total both (average) **\$1153** 88%

Sources: Suncorp Bank

Jake finds Yakka suit's a cracker

CONCRETER Jake Teusner proves his Hard Yakka gear is the new designer suit.

The 28-year-old's hands may be a bit dirtier and rougher than your average pen pusher but he is lapping up the spoils of his booming business.

Mr Teusner started his concreting business, JA & JA Concreting, three years ago — it now employs 11 staff — after slogging it for another employer.

While he is earning a healthy six-figure sum, the newly married Langwarrin man is happy with the life's

Aleks Devic

basics but splashed out when it came to his pride and joy — a beastly looking GMC Denali as his work car.

"At the moment I'm putting my money back into business," he said. "But I do have my luxuries — I like a nice car and enjoy holidays."

And, despite his healthy pay packet, the homeowner isn't about to start hitting up the designer shops in Melbourne's Collins St, opting to wear his fluoro vest proudly.