

INCREASING EMPLOYMENT PARTICIPATION

The following comments relate to both rural/regional and urban/outer suburban areas:-

The trend to offer part-time or casual employment needs to be reversed. This type of employment is attractive to employers because they avoid the extra payments attached to a full-time job e.g. leave loading, superannuation etc. The more such extras are enforced e.g. paid maternity leave, the more employers will be inclined to offer alternatives to full-time employment. The part-time/casual type of employment is not generally attractive to employees because it usually has little financial gain when one considers reduction by tax, loss of benefits such as health care card and discounts, cost of getting to job etc which leads to the attitude of it not being worth it to work. Also such employment can make it very difficult to arrange child care, appointments etc. It is also difficult to obtain finance (irregular income) with social security payments looked on more favourably as a regular income by financial institutes.

Some of the probable causes identified as creating a decline in employment opportunities in rural/regional communities are:

- Limited business and industry growth
- Settlement patterns
- Limited access to public transport
- The level of participation is driven by the lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of incentives/resources in rural communities
- Lack of suitable skills and cost of obtaining those skills
- Restrictions of establishing/creating job opportunities due to local government regulations

Some possible remedies would be:-

- Working smarter to educate communities for the creation of job opportunities
- Improved commitment by Job Network agencies to long term or under0skilled job seekers
- Encourage industry and commercial enterprises to establish in rural/regional areas by providing good communication systems e.g. broadband internet etc, good transport networks, reliable water and power supplies and so on.

“Notwithstanding the problems some perceive with casual/part time employment, it is attractive to

- mothers who may wish to re-enter or stay in the workforce to enable them to spend more time with school age children
- older persons who may choose not to leave the workforce if they can have reduced hours
- persons with disabilities whose problems may prevent them from working a full day, or full week

- students who may need to supplement their income for secondary or tertiary studies

There needs to be an initiative to encourage those reaching our current perceived retirement age, (with a generous entitlement to the social security system) to remain in place their position, or re-train to move into another possibly less physically demanding job. With the increasing use of IT, one could envisage an artisan upskilling and perhaps moving into a position as a teacher/mentor/administration clerk.

Industry as a whole needs to be made more aware that when they need to downsize their workforce, it is not necessarily those reaching retirement age who are offered the packages! I am aware of a senior nursing sister who, within eighteen months of retirement was offered a redundancy package to retire earlier.

The current incentive to persons to delay their claim for age pensions does not appear to be having any great effect – perhaps the baby boomers generation will have a change of attitude to the “pension at 65” entitlement.

The superannuation guarantee does not seem to have given a ‘quick fix’ to the problem, and one must have some concerns that these funds will in fact have substantial contents, given the sad history of the inappropriate investments they have made.

As we live longer and healthier lives, the ongoing ability of seniors to continue in a form of employment must be recognised.”