



Dr Brendan Nelson MP
Inquiry Chair
House of Representatives Committee on Employment,
Education and Workplace Relations
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Dr Nelson

Thank you for the opportunity for Tony Schell and Peter Wightman to contribute to the Committee's round table discussion regarding a Code of Conduct to assist job seekers who become unemployed. I was pleased that Centrelink was able to provide members with a further insight into Centrelink's role and the contribution Centrelink made to the BHP closure at Newcastle.

In regard to a Code of Conduct, Centrelink supports such a vehicle as it would assist in informing employers, administrators/liquidators and employees of their obligations and choices resulting from the closure or downsizing of a business. Centrelink's main concern is that workers who are newly unemployed are aware of their eligibility for income support, how any monies paid out for unused leave or redundancy affect their eligibility for income support and in particular, the level of assistance the individual may require including access to the job network. A Code of Conduct that places Centrelink in the information loop will ensure a smoother transition for newly unemployed workers.

In addition to providing job seeker assistance to redundant or newly unemployed employees there are other areas where Centrelink assists and the Code of Conduct will also help. Many newly unemployed workers require review of their family payments and child care assistance and this can be done together with their claim for income support. Customers are also referred to the Centrelink social worker for counselling and support about personal or family concerns and they may also assist with referrals to other community agencies.

In many business closures, Centrelink liaises directly with the employer or administrator to ensure that the affected workers are briefed on what services Centrelink can provide and how their monies affect eligibility for income support. In large closures Centrelink can provide on-site visits from specialist officers to ensure workers are informed about eligibility for income support and claim processes can be started as well. A Code of Conduct that informs employers of the steps to be followed for a business closure or retrenchment would close the lead time in Centrelink being able to offer this type of assistance.

With regard to how the Code of Conduct would apply to mature age workers, there is no difference in Centrelink's desire to inform newly unemployed workers of the impact of their unemployment as soon as possible. Centrelink recognises that mature job seekers may have additional needs compared to other job seekers and can provide specialist assistance to ensure mature job seekers are provided with appropriate tailored service. Centrelink ensures mature job seekers are comfortable with their One-to-One customer service officer. Special new claim seminars for older workers can be delivered and One-to-One's often link job seekers to other suitable community support, such as the Mature Workers Program, providing a package of assistance to the job seeker.

28 April 2000

Please contact Peter Wightman on 6244 6080 if you require any further assistance.

Sue Vardon
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