

# SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR WORKERS OVER 45 YEARS OF AGE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

## **Target Group in AWU submissions:**

Male and Female Workers 45 years of age and over who are low skilled, semi skilled or basic trade skilled. In other words, "Blue Collar Workers".

## **Target Industries from where these people may have been made unemployed:**

Textile Manufacturing  
Metal Manufacturing  
Steel Industry  
Mechanical Maintenance Contractors (Coal & Steel)  
Meat Industry  
Poultry Industry  
Aluminium Industry  
Steel Manufacturing

## **Major Issues affecting over 45's in gaining employment:**

- Lack of relevant skills
- Lack of training opportunities (when employed and when unemployed)
- Disabilities and injuries from previous employment
- Reluctance of Employers to employ over 45's, much prefer younger employees.
- Over 45's unable to relocate because of family commitments
- Rural and Regional unemployment very high, Labour market very competitive.
- Continued decline in "Blue Collar Industry" particularly manufacturing.
- High Tech Industries such as aerospace call centres and information Technology totally unsuitable for majority of "Blue Collar" workers.

### **Submitted by:**

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## **Specific issues for workers over 45 years of age seeking employment after unemployment.**

### **Target Group in A.W.U. Submissions:**

Male and female workers 45 years of age and over who are low skilled, semi-skilled or basic trade skilled. In other words “Blue Collar Workers”

These people have been made unemployed as a result of their former employers either dramatically reducing staff or indeed closing down. The list of companies that have done this in this Region is immense and manufacturing companies have been the majority employers to put people on the dole queues.

Over the last five years an example of this is as follows:

A. Goninan & Company	- Newcastle, Hexham, Taree
Long Airdox	- Lake Macquarie, Singleton
Joy Manufacturing	- Kurri Kurri
Jeffrey Dresser	- Lake Macquarie
BHP Steelworks	- Newcastle
BHP Steel related industries	- Newcastle
B.M.C.H.	- Maitland
Capral Aluminium Smelter	- Kurri Kurri
Scone Abattoir	- Scone
Aberdeen Abattoir	- Aberdeen
R.Z.M. Mines	- Hexham, Williamtown
National Textiles	- Rutherford
Depict	- Kurri Kurri
Rundles	- Newcastle
Bradmill	- Kotara
King Gee	- Kempsey

These companies are the large to medium size employers that have either closed or drastically reduced added to these the thousands of jobs lost in the Coal Industry as well as hundreds of smaller manufacturing employers that have put off the ones and twos that also add up to thousands.

### **Industries from where these people may have been made unemployed**

- Textile Manufacturing
- Metal Manufacturing
- Steel Industry
- Mechanical Maintenance Contractors
- Meat Industry
- Poultry Industry
- Aluminium Industry
- Steel Manufacturing & Fabrication
- Coal Production

In the main these people are being made redundant from value adding industries in the Manufacturing sector, these people were in the main full time permanent employees with lengthy service with their former employers.

## **Major issue affecting over 45's in gaining employment**

- **Lack of job search skills**

Many over 45's have been employed in lengthy service with their former company, after 15 or 20 years job search skills and confidence in looking for work are at a low, there is generally no support from employers in this area.

Centrelink and its service provider's give no support or training to Flex 1 unemployed people and Flex 2 unemployed people have very basic job search skills support.

- **Lack of relevant skills**

Workers over 45 have generally been employed in the one industry through 1,2, or 3 employers through their working lives. Their skills have been applicable to that industry or like industries throughout their lives.

In a region where the traditional manufacturing industries are rapidly declining, the remaining employment is going to younger and better trained and higher skilled workers. This does nothing for the confidence of the over 45's worker.

Smaller more High Tech. Industries are slowly moving to the Region and the educational and skill levels of unemployed blue-collar workers make them unsuitable for these companies.

- **Lack of training opportunities (when employed and when unemployed)**

With one very notable exception employers who are downsizing and making people redundant are not training people, particularly 45's and over with skills that may increase their chances of finding work sooner rather than later. This training may take the form of upgrading of skills and teaching higher skills in the same industry or it may be training to give the worker skills that may assist finding work in other industries. If the employer isn't in the position to provide this training then the Government has an obligation to provide further education and skills for these workers. Currently only Flex 3 unemployed people have any access to Government sponsored training and retraining.

The attached article by Stephen Koukoulas in the Financial Review January 31 2000 is worthy of close reading. The notable exception has of course been BHP Newcastle Steelworks Pathways Program.

- **Disabilities and/or Injuries from previous employment**

Injuries that have happened to unemployed workers in their previous employment are a major deterrent to a prospect employer employing these people. Of course, it is not only the 45's and over that have this problem, however, the older you are and the longer you have been in industry the more likely you are to have such an injury or disability. The over 45's have a large percentage of these type of problems. A back, shoulder, elbow, knee or ankle injury makes a persons task in finding employment so much more difficult.

- **Reluctance of Employers to employ over 45's. Many employers prefer younger employees.**

The anecdotal evidence is overwhelming. Over 45's are being left aside for younger job seekers. The former employees of the BHP Newcastle Steelworkers are now facing this great problem. I have received constant calls from ex BHP people who have no doubt whatsoever that they are being overlooked because of their age. After a number of knockbacks which they believe is age related they lose heart and are reluctant to keep on searching and having their noses rubbed in the "your too old" pile.

- **Over 45's unable to relocate because of family commitments**

The over 45's find they are unable to relocate because of the commitments they have to their children.

Children are mostly in the later years in high school or attending TAFE colleges. Disrupting them at this stage isn't an option. For Regional unemployed over 45 the only areas they have a better chance of finding employment is in the Capital cities and the cost of relocating to a capital city in terms of housing is prohibitive. The cost of rental accommodation is also very high.

- **Rural and Regional unemployment very high, Labour Market very competitive**

It seems the further you are away from the Capital cities the higher the unemployment rate and less employment opportunities there are.

As an example, the average unemployment figures for the Central Coast for 1999 (Wyong and Gosford Council areas) was 7.0%, the Lower Hunter (Cessnock, Maitland, Port Stephens, Lake Macquarie, and Newcastle Council areas) was 10.7%. The Upper Hunter (Singleton, Muswellbrook, Murrurundi, Scone, Merriwa, Gloucester and Great Lakes) also 10.7% and the Mid North Coast, Richmond and Tweed areas 13.2%. The New South Wales State average is 6%.

- **Continued decline in Blue-Collar" Industry particularly Manufacturing**

For all the reasons canvassed over the last 10 years or so Australian Manufacturing is declining. The numbers employed in this sector, in this Region has plummeted. This leaves the over 45's who have always worked in the Manufacturing sector and who have had little or no experience in other sectors and who have little or no skills or training in other sectors very little opportunity.

- **High Tech. Industries such as Aerospace, Call Centres and Information Technology totally unsuitable for majority of "Blue-Collar" Workers**

This issue falls squarely into the horses for courses category its fairyland stuff to think that after some retraining the workers I have spoken of can easily slot into these hi-tech areas.

Submitted by Kevin Maher

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