



We make it happen!
Good morning.

Employment Services ●
Business Development ●
Education & Training ●

A brief background to my organisation might be helpful as well as amplifying comments on our submission.

I am the Manager of the South Coast Business Enterprise Centre, one of nearly fifty BEC's throughout NSW, and with the assistance of the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development we provide free and confidential business counselling and other practical assistance to intending and existing business operators.

The SCBEC is a division of SERTEC Ltd – a not for profit, community based, public company and until recently I was also the Chief Executive Officer of SERTEC. We operate in the Shires of Cooma-Monaro, Snowy River, Bombala, Eurobodalla and Bega Valley as well as the ACT and Queanbeyan. Our annual turnover exceeds \$5 million and we have over 160 employees. As well as the BEC we are a Group Training Company, a Job Network contracted provider, a Retail Skills Centre and until March of this year we also operated as an internet service provider.



For a period of seven years we were a NEIS Managing Agent but were not successful in the previous round of tenders, missing out solely on the price competitive criterion.



It is rather ironic I appear before you today as until October 1995 I was FAS for Committees and Corporate Services in the Department of the House of Representatives. I can tell you that back in 1995 I would not have been equipped to provide constructive comment concerning your inquiry, but four years experience in rural NSW, dealing on a day to day basis with the unemployed, including those seeking to start a business, has given me a sound appreciation of the problems confronting the mature aged unemployed.



My colleagues have addressed/will address issues relating to over 45s seeking employment but a continuing priority must be a renewed focus on retraining and upskilling of the mature aged unemployed.



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There are a number of comments I would like to make regarding over 45's seeking to establish a business.

Our Business Enterprise Centre Network recently conducted a survey which indicated that:

- Between 30 & 35% of our clients are over 45 years of age (70% being male). We don't target this age group and generally provide similar services to other age groups.
- Retrenchment means that in many cases this is the first time without a job and its income security.
- There is a reluctance in the business community to employ a mature aged individual.
- There is often a desire to use the retrenchment package to buy themselves a job, in the form of a small business. In some instances this is extremely dangerous. More details are available in the letter from the CEO of BEC's NSW Ltd which you have before you.
- In many instances an over 45 retrenched worker needs to upgrade their skills. This experience is often difficult for them to accept, some even resent the fact.
- As a broad statement this generation is sometimes too proud to seek welfare and accept free practical services or support. Independence is a very fine principle, however reality requires the pride element to be pushed aside in an expedient process for cash flow and recreation of self esteem.

It never ceases to amaze me that if I suggested to a person that they place a \$20,000 bet on the even money favourite in race 4 at Randwick say, they would dismiss me with disdain. However, I regularly see the result of people who have invested their superannuation or redundancy packages

often totalling more than \$20,000 in so called business opportunities without having conducted adequate research or obtained appropriate business advice.

We all recognise the problems confronting the mature aged unemployed but the difficulty is finding workable solutions and developing strategies to achieve them. Clearly there is ample evidence to demonstrate the devastating effect of unemployment, particularly on the mature aged such as:

- Financial pressures
- Family breakdown
- Social dislocation
- Increased stress, onset of depression and health problems
- Erosion of confidence and self esteem
- Deskilling

I have a few suggestions which I believe would be worthy of further consideration:

- In recent years there has been a number of disadvantaged groups recognised by government as requiring specialised programs and other initiatives with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, youth, women, and people from non English speaking backgrounds being targeted. In my view there is now a need for the over 45's to be similarly recognised.
- Former Labour Market Initiatives such as the Job Skills Program and Special Employer Support Program did make a difference and their reintroduction perhaps in modified form will be likely to produce results. The Mature Workers' Program would benefit from expansion and relaxation of the current eligibility criteria.
- People over 50 can often exit from Intensive Assistance. However, many are keen to remain within a system that provides hope and training opportunities. These people contribute considerable social

capital particularly in regional Australia. Investing in them is really an investment in our region by way of economic and social development. There is a demonstrated need that their development should include structured training with an emphasis on computer literacy a priority.

- People over 45 often have a lot to offer and with appropriate training could utilise their wealth of knowledge and experience by working with unemployed youth in both a mentoring capacity and provision of literacy and numeracy development. I believe that much could be achieved if community work coordinators administering Work for the Dole Programs were given the flexibility to develop tailored Work for the Dole Programs for mature aged people who, with appropriate training could work with unemployed youth along the lines I have suggested.
- The success of the NEIS supports the case for its retention and also its expansion.
- I also see considerable benefit in provision of access to training and mentoring components of the NEIS for persons who may be ineligible under existing criteria.
- It is important that we as a community encourage the over 45's to realise that to seek support during times of readjustment and directional shift is wholly acceptable. As a society we need the experience, skills, vision and drive of the over 45's if Australia is to be able to continue to grow and be competitive within the global economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee.