



Speech by

**Mr N. ROBERTS**

**MEMBER FOR NUDGE**

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Hansard 24 August 1999

### **MATURE AGE UNEMPLOYMENT**

**Mr ROBERTS** (Nudgee—ALP) (7.15 p.m.): I wish to speak on a subject which does not receive the attention it deserves in the media and in the policy framework of Governments. That is the problem of mature age unemployment. New research has now identified unemployed workers aged over 45 years as a significantly disadvantaged group deserving of special attention. In the last decade of downsizing, many such workers lost jobs and faced extreme difficulty in returning to the work force. To compound their problem, many of the new growth areas of employment were in areas which required higher levels of education and familiarity with new and emerging technologies. With growing levels of youth unemployment beginning to emerge at this time, Government policy responses were also targeted at this group to the disadvantage of the older workers.

It is instructive to examine some statistics relating to this group of almost forgotten workers. In June 1999, almost 32% of the Australian work force was aged 45 and over. This category also makes up about 20% of the total unemployed in Australia and about 14% of unemployed persons in Queensland. Whereas the proportion of mature aged unemployed is less than their representation in the work force, the significance of the disadvantage they face lies in the factors which come into play once they become unemployed. In summary, they are unemployed for longer and experience higher levels of underemployment.

Additionally, the recorded unemployment figures probably understate the real extent of the problem. Recent research has indicated that older workers are more likely than younger workers to withdraw from actively seeking employment when faced with a lack of employment opportunities. After some research, which is reported in the Australian Bulletin of Labour of March 1999, some revised unemployment figures were calculated that took into account these so-called discouraged job seekers. They showed that for workers aged 45 years and older, the actual unemployment rate was, for males, 1.4% and, for females, 3.4% higher than the recorded rate. And for workers aged 60 to 64, the actual unemployment rate was 4.2% higher for males and 10% higher for females.

One of the additional disadvantage factors for the mature aged unemployed is that they are more likely to remain without paid work for a longer period—almost twice as long as a person aged under 45 years. In the age group 35 to 54 years, the average duration of unemployment for males was 93.8 weeks and for females 72.4 weeks. For workers aged 55 and above, the figures were 104 weeks and 106.9 weeks respectively. The stark contrast is revealed when compared with workers aged 15 years and above, where the average duration of unemployment was 69.7 weeks and 52.2 weeks respectively. Underemployment for mature aged workers also revealed similar levels of disadvantage. Underemployment exists when a worker is employed in a part-time capacity when full-time work is desired.

With these difficulties prevailing, it is pleasing to see at least some recognition of the problem by the State Government and also community groups. Under the Government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives, the Community Employment Assistance Program has a specific component which targets funding at workers aged over 40 years. Whereas this program is commendable, more needs to be done. What is of most concern is the fact that the Federal Government provides for no specific program to assist mature aged unemployed persons aged between 45 and 60. The only assistance is a mature aged allowance, which is applicable to eligible persons aged 60 years and over.

One community group in my electorate that has responded positively to this need is DOME, which is the acronym for Don't Overlook Mature Experience. DOME is located in Banyo and is principally focused on promoting the comprehensive range of skills and experience gained by its members over their working lives. It actively seeks out employment opportunities for its members by promoting the positive attributes of mature aged workers. DOME is a free service to employers, who are only requested to make a donation when employing one of its members.

DOME has recently received funding under the Community Employment Assistance Program and Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund. I commend DOME on its work and highlight again the need for Governments at both the State and Federal level to take more specific action to assist the mature aged unemployed on the basis that they are a significantly disadvantaged group in the community.

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