**Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability**

# Submission No 289

**Name** Peta Dixon

**Submission made by**

Older Australian in work

# Submission regarding Older Australians / Australians with Disability / Both

### **Your experience**

**Have you (or the person you are submitting on behalf of) experienced employment discrimination?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Did you take any action in relation to the employment discrimination you experienced?**

Yes

No

**Please tell us more, for example, what action you took and how effective you felt it was; or why you chose not to take any action.**

I took no action as it would be difficult to prove that I was discriminated against because of age (and/or weight). They use phrases in their feedback like 'not collaborative enough' or 'your experience wasn't exactly what we wanted'.

**Did your experience of employment discrimination impact on your participation in the workforce? (For example, did you have to stop work, change jobs or take sick leave?)**

Yes

No

**Please tell us more**

I was lucky enough to obtain a contract role through a contact. When that role finished, that particular manager apologised for not being able to accommodate me but that she had promised the job I was doing to another person in her network. Fortunately, through her network, she was able to place me in another **[redacted]**, where I am now. Unfortunately, that contract completes on 18 December 2015 and I will be seeking employment through the usual range of SEEK advertisements and www.jobs.nsw.gov.au and any other avenue. My salary over the last 18 months has reduced from its high point with my former employer, from whom I was made redundant, to my first contract role and then, again, to this role, by some $20,000.

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**If yes, or not sure, what do you think these barriers might be?**

For so many years, employers have been told that older workers are not flexible enough, do not adapt (or are resistant) to change well and are unsophisticated or ignorant of computers and their uses.

In my view, we older workers have a wealth of experience. We do not get more stupid as we age. It is a well-known fact that our IQs increase as we age. I am particularly intelligent, for a non-university-qualified employee. I could have been university-educated had circumstances changed. I have completed a number of courses through the TAFE system which have made me very qualified for the role I do. When employers do contemplate hiring an older person, they want them to do soul-destroying rote or highly manual labour for two-thirds or half of what they would pay a younger person. Our needs are no less as we age. In fact, they are sometimes greater, depending on our health.

On that point, employers also, discriminatorily, think that an older worker is going to take time off for health reasons. I can tell you than I do not take time off work for health reasons. My health is good, so it is not something that should be generalised across the older age group.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on gaining and keeping employment for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Nothing overt of which I am aware. However, there is the non-response to applications submitted via various platforms. There are prejudices concerning the older person's health and also arrangements for their grandchildren.

**What are the incentives and disincentives for older Australians/Australians with disability to work?**

**Incentives:**

Personally, my incentive to work is to keep me interested and interesting. It is to provide an income for me to support myself **[redacted]**. I am well qualified and I wish to continue to work at the level and in the role for which I am trained. It is also to enable me to accrue additional superannuation and allow me to live well and without the support of the aged pension. I want to be able to afford health insurance at the level that will enable the best care for me and my **[redacted dependants]**. In short, I want to continue to live as I have done until 2014.

In terms of government support, the only incentive of which I am aware is a $10,000 payment to companies to employ an older worker. Unfortunately, for me, I think that incentive applies to roles that are available through Centrelink. The roles for which I am qualified, and at the salary level to which I am used, are not jobs available through Centrelink.

**Disincentives:**

The roles that are offered to people over 50 are generally lesser roles than those for which they are trained and, certainly, at a much lesser salary. If it wasn't for the fact that I secured contract roles through contacts, I would have no income. As it is, it is $20,000 less than my last permanent role.

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and workplace policies in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Please tell us of examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work that you are aware of.**

None of which I'm aware to date.

### **Solutions**

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Many of the conditions of employment that are available to all workers these days emanate from rights won at work by unions, starting first in the public service. When the public service becomes the employer of choice because of a certain condition for a particular area (equal employment opportunities, maternity leave, carer's leave, holidays, flexible working conditions), these are eventually picked up by the private sector when it is harder to source employees. I believe there needs to be a mandate imposed upon the public service to employ a percentage of employees in meaningful and well-paid positions. Until such a mandate is imposed, the private sector will continue to discriminate via their instructions to their own internal and external HR resources.

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Affirmative action for older people needs to be imposed. It worked with women and long-term unemployed youth. It will work for older people who wish to work. I am not saying that all older people wish to work, but I do. Only yesterday, there was an article in the Sydney Morning Herald by Elizabeth Farrelly singing the benefits of not retiring.

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

Affirmative action imposed upon government and quasi-governmental departments and institutions to employ older people. In this day and age where people are generally healthier and fitter and a retirement of age of 65 is unsuitable to many - for whatever reasons - employer mindsets have not kept pace. In those instances, there needs to something to create behavioural change. They will not change on their own.

I want to do my job, at the level at which I'm trained to perform it and mentally capable of doing so, at a salary to which I am used.