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

# Submission No 180

**Name** Greg Goudie on behalf of DOME Association Inc

**Submission made by**

[x]  Membership based organisation

# Organisation or Government Agency Submission

### **About you**

**What is your role within your organisation?**

[ ]  Owner

[x]  Manager

[ ]  Human Resources Manager

[ ]  Other

**If other, please tell us your role within your organisation**

**What is your experience of providing work/services/advocacy for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

I have worked with DOME Association since 2001 assisting unemployed mature age (40+) people find employment. This has also included people with a disability. I started in the organisation as Employment Manager, directly assisting the unemployed and took over as Executive Director in 2008.

The DOME Association (Don’t Overlook Mature Expertise) is a not for profit/volunteer organisation that has been in existence since 1981 with the sole aim of assisting mature aged (Over 40) unemployed back into the workforce. The majority of funding for the association is obtained through State Government contracts through DSD with special project funding obtained from time to time through other Commonwealth and State Government Departments.

Operating mainly in Adelaide and some South Australia Regional Areas, each year we register 800-900 mature age unemployed people and we presently have over 2,500 people registered with our organisation of varying degrees of skills and abilities who need assistance to improve or develop new skills to gain employment. This level of registration is limited by our capacity to process and assist these people. The main issue is ongoing funding to provide a reliable staffing arrangement. We have reviewed and implemented a second 3 year strategic plan which includes locating different income streams to reduce our reliance on specific areas of government funding for our operation.

Every year we list about 500 vacancies from a database of over 2,000 employers that have used our services. These employers are mostly small businesses covering a broad range of industries including manufacturing, retail and community service. We assist approximately 400 people per year into various forms of full & part time employment. Comparing this to the total funds employed by DOME this equates to about $1,250 per employment outcome. In addition to these 400 employment placements there would be another 400 that are not reported due to low hours (less than 15/week) or a short contract period. As a volunteer organisation we also provide people with a facility that allows them to upgrade or develop new office & administration skills that can allow them to transition into new careers.

Whilst we may not be large enough to give an accurate insight into the national situation for mature age unemployed, statistically there is enough data to provide accurate examples of what this disadvantaged segment of the potential workforce face and the possible support and assistance required.

**Do you have any case studies of the experience of older Australians/Australians with disability working or looking for work?**

Too numerous to mention. However we recently conducted a survey of the 1,600+ unemployed mature age job seekers and the report on that survey is attached.

The following is from the Executive Summary, but I also refer you to the “Comments” at the end of the report.

The survey was emailed in March 2015 to 1,795 people registered with DOME who were unemployed or working less than 20 hours/week and were seeking to increase their working hours. 644 people or 36% of people contacted responded to the survey. The participants resided in the Adelaide Metropolitan area, the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu regions.

The most prominent age group of respondents was in the 50-60 age group with 53%, this highlights a trend over recent years in the average age of people registering with DOME dropping from 60 to 55 years of age. 60% of respondents were male also highlighting a recent trend toward more males seeking employment. 77% of respondents were unemployed and 23% were working part time or less than 20 hours/week.

Immediate financial commitments were cited by 56% of respondents as the main reason for seeking employment.

Reflecting a major issue for mature age unemployed, 50% of respondents were unemployed for over 1 year and 29% for over 2 years. Over 80% of all respondents wanted more than 20 hours/week employment, the most popular preference was 30-39 hours/week.

56% of the respondents felt they needed assistance to get training to learn new skills, 31% wanted career advise. 36% felt the needed help with resumes or interview skills.

The survey indicates that those with a Cert 3 and 4 vocational qualification are more likely to be employed than those with a Diploma level qualification. Reinforcing this point, of those that had a vocation qualification 33% were employed compared to only 27% being unemployed. Of those that had only achieved high school education 35% were unemployed, compared to only 31% who were employed. There was little difference in employment status between those who held a tertiary qualification of Diploma level or higher.

When asked about the factors that might have affected their applications for jobs the main responses were that younger recruitment consultants discriminated against older people, recruiters had a lack of industry knowledge and understanding of the relevance of the applicants skills and experience, most felt they were considered too old by employers, they felt they needed specialised skills development to fit job requirements but also felt they had been perceived as over qualified and most considered the current job market as too competitive.

Issues such as caring responsibilities, language or ethnic differences, gender issues, interaction with the recruiter, mismatch with workplace culture and ill health or disability were not considered to affect job applications.

Responses from both the currently employed and unemployed were very similar in the above areas. Even those that had work felt that there had been age discrimination in the process of finding work.

Around 50% of the employed respondents considered their resume writing, job application and on line skills as Good compared to around 40% of the unemployed respondents. A similar ratio of respondents rated their skill in this area as Poor to Fair, indicating the need for more support in this area

Around 90% of respondents had a personal computer and used it for job applications, and other online activities such as paying bills. Only 61% used the newspapers for job search. Around 70% felt they understood the current job market and that their skills were still in demand. Even so 92% were willing to learn new skills to gain employment. The yes responses were marginally higher for the employed group, indicating slightly higher use of technology and a more positive attitude and understanding of the job market.

**What are the impacts of employment discrimination on older Australians/Australians with disability working or looking for work?**

One of the key impacts is the loss of confidence and self esteem. This is usually brought about by the time that it takes older people to find work. The survey above highlighted this issue and other agencies and reports provide a figures of 60 to 90 weeks as an average for this group to find employment. Most struggle to understand why they can’t gain employment when they may have been employed in one or many jobs for 20 or 40 years and now find that “they aren’t worth considering for jobs”. A result of this attitude toward the older job seeker is that many just give up looking for work and become part of the hidden unemployed.

This loss of confidence is also impacted by the apparent indifference toward the older job seeker by recruiters. 55% of our survey participants agreed with the statement that there was age discrimination by younger recruiters.

### **Barriers**

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

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

We have come across examples of people who have had to leave jobs or been made redundant just because they are the oldest and younger people have been retained.

**Is employment discrimination a barrier (please tick all that are relevant):**

[ ] While working in a job

[x] While looking for work

[x] While dealing with recruitment companies

**Please tell us more**

Our attached survey highlights the degree of discrimination felt by older job seekers. Many reported the attitudes of younger recruiters toward them at interviews, where they felt the recruiter was not interested in them as a candidate. Whether this was real or not, it was a strong perception by the job seeker.

**What impact does employment discrimination have on older Australians/Australians with disability gaining and keeping employment?**

The main impact is to the job seekers confidence. They do not feel they are wanted by employers and in many cases will simply give up looking and we then create a group pf “hidden” unemployed.

Another issue is that of generational unemployment. The age demographic DOME supports is also the demographic that is likely to have children who are job seekers and will be influenced by their parents. If the parent is unable to find employment & “drops out” then this can become the standard for the child. Early intervention to assist the mature age can also have a positive effect on our youth unemployment.

There is also the obvious financial impact. Many older job seekers that come to DOME for assistance tell us they must find work or they are likely to become homeless. Our survey demonstrated clearly that the prime reason for finding employment by this group was “To meet immediate financial needs”

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

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

A key issue with unemployed older job seekers is how they can very easily progress to Long Term (1 year) and Very Long Term (2 years) unemployed. The current employment support services do not allow for early intervention for this group. They are generally expected to operate without support for 3-6 months before any real support is provided. Anecdotal comments from job seekers aged 50+ is that the recruiter will suggest they retire early and not bother to look for work. If this is the attitude of the employment support services, then it can be expected that this demographic will become long term unemployed.

This may explain our observations that there are less job seekers registering with DOME to find employment over the age of 60. We have seen the numbers consistently trend downward from over 400 in 2007-08 to 200 in 2014-15.

As for laws that may impact I refer you to The Australian Law Reform Commission’s report, *Access All Ages-Older Workers and Commonwealth Laws,* which was noted in your introduction to this enquiry

**What are the incentives and disincentives in employing older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**Incentives**

Older workers are often more flexible in regard to their working conditions and working hours.
Older workers are interested in training and will use it to build on their experience.
Older workers take less sick days than older workers.
Older workers have experience and skills and are quite capable of learning new skills.

**Disincentives**

Compared to a younger worker, there are no disincentives.

### **Good practice**

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

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please let us know about practices you are aware of.**

Bunnings offer flexible workplace agreements that allow older workers to work part time.
DOME also has other small business employers that come to us on a regular basis seeking staff.

### **Solutions**

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

An interesting response from our survey was around the questions on age and gender discrimination. (See page 18 and 19 of the attached survey report)
Only 9% disagreed with the statement that younger recruitment consultants discriminated against them. Whereas on the question of gender discrimination only 9% agreed there was gender discrimination.
Which tells me that the publicity, programs, quotas, advertising, advocacy and regulations around gender discrimination is having an impact. We need to apply the same rigour and support to the issues around age discrimination. Apart from the HRC site and the (very) occasional good news story on a Current Affair, age discrimination barely gets a mention.

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

Greater awareness of the benefits of older workers being promoted in general media. Various government agencies over the years have produced videos and print articles on this topic, but they generally end up buried in government websites. Organisations such as DOME do not have the resources to publically promote the value of the older worker, it needs more resources at a government level.

More employment support programs being offered as early intervention for the older job seeker. When an older job seeker becomes unemployed for longer than 1 year they are more likely to give up looking for work.

Many older job seekers cannot do the work they have been employed in for many years or their prior occupation doesn’t exist anymore. They then find it difficult to find another career and in a lot of cases are basically excluded from the workforce. A specifically targeted career advice service is required to assist these older job seekers find a new career. This also requires funding support as these unemployed do not have the finances to fund these activities.

As with the previous point there is a need for training and reskilling of many older job seekers who can’t work in their previous occupation. Some will require completely new skills for different occupations. Other surveys have highlighted the need for computer skills training, particularly those skills required in the workplace. The training required here will also require funding support.

There is a need for a more concerted effort to educate and inform the attitudes of recruitment agencies toward the older job seeker.

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

More general media presentation of the value of the older worker.
Target recruiters with the attitude toward the older job seeker.
As a key issue with unemployed older job seekers is the transition into long term and very long term unemployed, there is a need for early intervention with employment programs for this group.
More funded training support for older job seekers.
Specific Career Advise programs for older job seekers.