

Job losses in the Australian steel industry have been driven by global overcapacity, high production costs, and shifting market demand, with significant downturns occurring in the early 1980s, 2011–2015, and ongoing pressures on specific sites. Key recent developments include hundreds of contractor jobs being cut at the Whyalla steelworks in early 2025.



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Historical and Recent Job Loss Data

- **2025 (Whyalla):** GFG Alliance brought forward 350 contractor job cuts in January 2025 at the Whyalla Steelworks following a contract end.
- **2013–2021 (Global Trend):** Almost 1 in 10 steelworkers in Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity (GFSEC) economies (which includes Australia) lost their jobs during this period.
- **2015 (BlueScope/Arrium):** BlueScope cut 500 jobs to handle falling prices. Arrium cut approximately 200 jobs with an additional 50 contractor losses during the same period.
- **2011 (BlueScope):** 800 direct employees and 300 contractors were displaced by the shutdown of a blast furnace.
- **1981–1983 (BHP):** Steel industry employment fell from 20,350 in May 1981 to 14,400 by May 1983.



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Key Trends and Impacts

- **Regional Impact:** Job losses are geographically concentrated, primarily impacting Wollongong (NSW) and Whyalla (SA).
- **Structural Change:** A 2016 report suggested that a total shutdown of the Illawarra steel industry could lead to the loss of over 10,000 jobs.
- **Impact on Contractors:** Job cuts are often accompanied by severe reductions in contractor roles, which are sometimes not included in headline job loss figures.
- **Industry Dynamics:** While some parts of the industry face decline, other parts, particularly those involved in supporting high-demand infrastructure projects, have faced skills shortages.



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Contextual Factors

The decline in employment is largely driven by "dumped" steel—foreign steel entering the Australian market at low prices—which forces local producers to cut jobs and decrease capacity. Additionally, between 2012 and 2022, GFSEC steel industries saw a 22% reduction in exports, adding pressure to local jobs.



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