



Job Watch Inc. Level 10/21 Victoria Street, Melbourne Vic. 3000
Ph: (03) 9662 9458 Fax: (03) 9663 2024
Web: www.job-watch.org.au

ABN 74615132361

7th March, 2003

TCF Inquiry
Productivity Commission
P.O. Box 80
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Dear Sir/Madam

Job Watch – the employment rights legal centre – educates workers about their rights at work. We provide a telephone advice service for the Victorian public, advocacy for disadvantaged workers, publications, rights based presentations to schools and community groups and law reform activities and campaigns to influence policy. Analysis of the data received through our telephone advice service shows significant calls from manufacturing workers enquiring about retrenchment, redundancy and unfair working conditions. A significant number of outworkers contact us describing unfair treatment from their employers.

Job Watch believes that further tariff reductions are not in the interest of workers in the textiles, clothing, footwear and leather industry and will lead businesses to collapse with significant job losses. Workers will experience increasing poverty and social displacement. Further tariff cuts will also contribute to the destruction of an industry that has formed a vibrant and critical part of Australian manufacturing for over a hundred years.

The Federal Government's decision on post 2005 tariff and industry assistance is crucial to the industry's survival. Our major trading partners have not reduced their tariff levels at the same pace as Australia and importantly there are a range of non-tariff barriers in place that make it difficult for companies to export. The fundamental premise of previous tariff cuts has not eventuated.

The restructuring of industry, erosion of job security, flexibility issues and the push for greater de-regulation, particularly in Victoria, has impacted significantly on workers in the textiles, clothing and footwear industry. Sixty percent of workers in the TCF industry work in Victoria. Many of these workers are women from non-English speaking backgrounds and many are over forty-five years of age. Women are already highly concentrated in precarious forms of employment with over three-quarters of all part-time jobs and 60% of casual jobs being held by women. Women are losing out in the labour reform process and further tariff cuts will impact adversely on women and their families and make their life more difficult.

This submission supports the views of the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia. Job Watch recommends the Federal Government provides the textile,

clothing, footwear and leather industry with supportive policies so the industry remains strong. For example, the Government should fund an industry assistance program similar to Strategic Investment Program Scheme (SIPS), with a requirement that business assistance is tied to on-going employment of Australian workers.

In addition, Job Watch supports the funding of a re-training program similar to the Labour Adjustment Program (LAP) specific to the TCF sector. Retrenched workers will require ongoing support and further professional assistance in the form of language, literacy and numeracy; skills re-training; information technology; and formal recognition of current skills and competencies. Re-training incentives will assist retrenched workers to obtain alternative employment.

Features of the Labour Adjustment Program should include paying workers whilst they engage in training, and providing assistance in overcoming training barriers for workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in particular. To maintain this vibrant and strong industry, the government should implement a community education campaign for business which improves perceptions of older workers, provides quality training under New Apprenticeships, and cleans up the image of the industry to attract new entrants.

Job Watch would also like to remind the Federal Government of its promise, prior to the previous election, to amend the Corporations Law. Amendments should ensure worker's entitlements are given priority above all other creditors so that workers receive 100% of entitlements in the event of a business collapse.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours faithfully,

Zana Bytheway
Executive Director
Job Watch