



Australian Government
Department of Communications

Drew Clarke

Secretary

Mr Jason Whittaker
Editor - Crikey
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Dear Mr Whittaker

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your proposed article. It contains many unfair, emotive and incorrect accusations.

The Department of Communications acknowledges the sustained contribution that staff working in the Digital Switchover Taskforce have made over a number of years and thanks them for their hard work and dedication. In particular, the Department appreciates the efforts of staff during 2013 when they have faced a high workload and uncertainty surrounding their future employment with the knowledge that the program would end in December 2013.

The Department has been working with all staff, both ongoing and non-ongoing, since September 2012 to ensure that they were fully aware of, and understood the implications of, the ending of the program in December 2013.

Effectively delivering the final stages of the Digital Switchover Program, while carefully balancing the need to reduce staffing, has been an ongoing focus for me and my senior management team during 2013 and has been an ongoing challenge for Taskforce staff.

The Department has put in place a range of measures to assist staff during the period, including providing access to career coaching, assistance with applications and interview preparation, establishing an internal Agility Register to assist with the redeployment of a significant number of staff, and conducting an open expression of interest for voluntary redundancies across the Department in April 2013 to assist in creating additional opportunities for staff from the Taskforce to be redeployed. We have consulted extensively with the Community and Public Sector Union, and the Department's Workplace Consultative Committee in implementing these measures, which have been successful in significantly reducing the number of staff remaining in the Taskforce.

Despite these measures, last week, ongoing staff were advised, in accordance with the provisions of the Department's Enterprise Agreement, that they are potentially excess and were offered the opportunity to discuss the implications of this situation with the Taskforce's senior management to ascertain whether they are interested in a voluntary redundancy or whether they wish to be redeployed. Non-ongoing staff have been being advised since September 2012 that their contracts would not be extended beyond their existing term.

Under the new recruitment arrangements recently announced by the Government, ongoing staff within the Department, who are potentially excess, will continue to be considered for any ongoing vacancies in the Department and can also be considered for broader placement in the APS through the APS Redeployment Register. Once staff have considered their options and advised their preference, a decision will be made about whether or not to declare any or all ongoing staff excess and formally offer them a voluntary redundancy. If a staff member chooses not to accept a voluntary redundancy, depending on their circumstances, they will have either 7 or 13 months in which to be redeployed. No ongoing staff member will be required to leave the Department in January 2014.

The opinions provided about working in the Taskforce are naturally disappointing. Projects of the size and scale of digital switchover must be managed dynamically, with structures and programs adjusted over time. At all times, the Department has kept staff informed, and consulted as required.

I have, and will continue to, recognise the efforts of past and current Taskforce staff in implementing a massive project that touches the lives of all Australians and has taken more than 10 years to finalise. The digital switchover will be complete across Australia on 10 December, but the legacy of the work undertaken by all those people who have been involved will live on for many years to come.

Yours sincerely

Drew Clarke
3 December 2013