

Redundancy numbers belie Liberal promises

Staff tapped on shoulder

By Phillip Thomson
Public Service Reporter

More than 70 staff at the Australian Valuation Office will be forced to take redundancy, revealed the Senate estimates hearings this week, sparking claims about broken promises regarding natural attrition.

The office's closure was formally announced earlier this year, bringing an end to about a century of history as the Australian government's primary source of advice and information on valuations of real property, intellectual property and non-current assets.

The office ceases to exist at the end of this financial year (June 30) and the final 100 staff of the formerly 198-strong entity will leave then, or in early July, after loose ends are tied up.

More than 40 AVO staff have taken voluntary redundancies. Another 31 have expressed interest in voluntary redundancies and 10 of the original 198 AVO workforce were contractors whose contracts ended quickly after the announcement of closure. Three AVO employees have swapped redundancies with colleagues in the Australian Tax Office. One AVO staff member has died.

Fraser MP and shadow assistant treasurer Andrew Leigh said ACT Liberal Senator Zed Seselja repeatedly promised before the election the Coalition would only cut jobs from the public service through natural attrition, not through redundancies.

"We now know that, by the end of this month, dozens of AVO staff will be forced out the door," Dr Leigh said.

"How can Canberra trust anything the Liberal tell them now?" Mr Seselja fired back by saying the closure of the AVO was a hangover from the application of Labor's



LOGGERHEADS: ACT Liberal Senator Zed Seselja and opposition assistant treasurer Andrew Leigh.

long-standing efficiency dividends. "The former Labor government, which Andrew Leigh was part of, applied efficiency dividends to many government departments," Mr Seselja said.

"These departments in turn reduced their spending on the AVO - like the Department of Human Services, which reduced its spending by 50 per cent."

"Their work alone accounted for 80 per cent of AVO revenues. Andrew Leigh and Labor made a decision, which they did their best to hide, to cut 14,500 public service jobs and these decisions are now flowing through the bureaucracy."

The Coalition went to the last election promising 12,000 public service job cuts through natural attrition. It has since said it has parked that policy after finding 14,500 "hidden" cuts Labor was making - a claim backed up by the finance department's David Tunc but disputed by Labor. The Coalition has since committed to a reduction in the bureaucracy of 16,500.

Earlier, public servants about to be dumped from the office were gagged from venting their feelings to reporters or on social media amid the political row over the office's closure.



REWARDING: Physiotherapist Craig Honeybrook who has just returned from Arnhem Land. Photo: JAY CRONAN

A hands-on mission to help those in remote areas

By Natasha Boddy

In the remote communities of the Yolngu homelands in Arnhem Land, access to mainstream health services can often be a long drive away.

The isolation has also meant, for many Yolngu people, services such as physiotherapy have been out of reach, leaving some to battle conditions and injuries for decades. But a team of physiotherapists from Canberra is working hard to change that and improve the health of disadvantaged people in rural Australia by volunteering services to remote communities in areas such as Palm Island and north-east Arnhem Land.

Staff from Gungahlin-based Sport & Spinal Physiotherapy have partnered with not-for-profit organisation SOS Health Foundation,

which connects physio and allied health workers with volunteer opportunities, and have just completed their fourth outreach mission - to the Yolngu homelands on the Gove Peninsula in the Northern Territory.

The outreach missions have been so rewarding, the Canberra physiotherapy practice plans to start a similar program in small villages in Nepal. The first trip is set for November.

Sport & Spinal Physiotherapy practice principal Craig Honeybrook said the outreach missions were born out of wanting to give something back and make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged people.

Speaking about the latest mission to north-east Arnhem Land, Mr Honeybrook said many communities

in the Yolngu homelands had only basic housing, a school, a health clinic and possibly an airstrip, but the nearest town for main services, Nhulunbuy, was a three- to four-hour drive away.

He said many of the people had had little or no access to services such as physiotherapy, some revealing they had suffered conditions and injuries for decades. He was particularly struck by a case involving a man who fell off his bike at the age of 12, but because the injury was not treated, the man had one leg three centimetres shorter than the other. Despite severe hip osteoarthritis, the man's only complaint was a "little bit of back pain".

Mr Honeybrook said the Yolngu people were "stoic" and tended to endure painful injuries, which he

claimed could have easily been fixed had they been treated earlier.

For Mr Honeybrook, the cliché that giving is more rewarding than receiving, rings true. "With volunteering, you always get back more than you give, generally," he said. "Each person that has come up there has had a good time, enjoyed their experience and the big thing is it's making a difference. I would say it's a significant difference in the health of the people in the homelands."

Mr Honeybrook said the missions had also been great for staff morale, giving them something they found rewarding and could look forward to.

Mr Honeybrook said living in Canberra, it was easy to forget how difficult it could be for people in remote communities to access some services.

He said the next outreach mission, planned for November, would go a little further afield. The team including a physiotherapist, dentist and even teachers - is set to visit Madii village in the Dhading district, a six-hour drive from Kathmandu.

The idea came about after he spoke with a friend who owns a trekking company. Mr Honeybrook has used his practice's outreach missions to encourage other Canberra businesses to get involved in volunteering.

"We focus on helping people in health because that's what we do. In Canberra, it's a nice place to live, it's got great services and people do pretty well but in some of these other places, they're quite disadvantaged," he said. "These remote communities could use any help that any Canberra businesses could offer."

Public servant had 2500 child porn images, court told

By Christopher Knaus

A young public servant allegedly found with "disturbingly explicit" child pornography has been denied bail. The 21-year-old, who cannot be named, was found with about 2500 illegal images and is also accused of using his Nintendo DS to take explicit images of a girl, thought to be a minor.

His downloads were tracked by the Australian Federal Police, who began

investigating in late March. The online activity was traced to a Canberra address, and the operation culminated with a raid on the home on Thursday.

When they arrived, police say the man admitted downloading child pornography onto his laptop for the past three to four years.

The officers also looked at his Nintendo finding images thought to be of his niece taken with the device in January 2010. Those same images

were found in a folder on his laptop. Police told the ACT Magistrates Court on Friday that they were still working through the images.

The defendant applied for bail before Magistrate Bernadette Boss on Friday morning, as emotional family members watched on.

The prosecution opposed his release, fearing he could interfere with witnesses and evidence, and may reoffend. Dr Boss said she was particularly concerned about any

intimidation of the man's niece.

The man's lawyer argued bail conditions could manage the risk, saying his client was now under the "very watchful eye" of the AFP and his family. His public service job, the court heard, was not likely to remain a future option for him.

Electronic devices have been taken from the man, and his defence lawyer argued conditions could be put in place that he not use any such equipment.

Dr Boss refused bail, noting the prosecution case was strong, and that conditions could not manage the risk the man would intimidate or interfere with witnesses.

He will reappear in the ACT Children's Court - because he was a juvenile when the first alleged offence occurred - later this month.

Dr Boss noted he was a vulnerable prisoner and said he should only be in custody for as long as is absolutely necessary to protect the community.

Payout for flu vaccine injury

A five-year-old girl has received a confidential multimillion-dollar payout from pharmaceutical manufacturer CSL Ltd and the state of Western Australia after becoming severely disabled from a flu vaccination.

On Friday, Federal Court of Australia Justice Michael Barker approved the compensation.

Saba Button got the vaccination under a government-promoted scheme in April 2010 when a GP injected a 0.25ml dose of CSL 2010

Fluvax into her left arm. As a consequence of the vaccination, she suffered hypoxic brain injury and severe disabilities.

Her life expectancy has been significantly shortened and she will require constant care for the rest of her life.

The Buttons said the settlement was a huge relief. "No one wants to really go through court ... to settle it through mediation is a great relief for us," father Mick Button told reporters. AAP

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Wild Dog and Fox Baiting

South East Local Land Service (LLS) wishes to advise that 1080 wild dog and fox baiting will be taking place in the following National Parks, Nature Reserves and locations until 31 December 2014:

- Kosciuszko National Park, covering Bumberry, Snowy Plain, Gungahlin, Denison, Nungar Plain, Circuits, Pedons, Jadar, Half Moon, Morgan, Scabby Nature Reserve, Yaouk Nature Reserve, Brest Range areas.
- Wadbilliga National Park, covering the following areas: Jillcambra, Razorback and Kybeyan, Tolbar, Lucas Creek, Powerline.
- Dewa National Park covering the following areas: Badja, Wola, Minuma.
- Gourcock National Park covering the following areas: Green Hills, Peppers Swamp, Qusanbeyan River, Rocky Range, and Slap Up.
- Bredbo/Michelago Clear Range Fire Trail on the ACT/NSW border.

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Female figure (Moai Pao) detail, Rapa Nui (Easter Island), eastern Polynesia, probably early 19th century, Otago Museum, Dunedin