

# YOUTH JOBS CRISIS

John McCarthy

QUEENSLAND'S youth is at risk of ending up on the scrap heap of the long-term unemployed, with the jobless rate hitting 19 per cent for 15 to 19-year-olds.

While the Australian Bureau of Statistics puts the overall unemployment rate at 5.8 per cent, its figures

show young people are three times more likely to be without a job, leading to fears of homelessness and drug dependency.

About 45,000 Queenslanders of all ages have joined the jobless queue in the past year, and the State Government forecasts another 40,000 will join them before there is a turnaround.

But National Retailers Association executive director Gary Black said the industry was particularly concerned about the social cost of youth unemployment. He expects the industry, which is the largest employer of young people, to keep shedding jobs in the next six months.

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## Young jobless levels reaching crisis point

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"The longer term cost arising from these displaced people is that sometimes they lose contact with the workforce and the numbers of long-term unemployed increases significantly, and that becomes a big problem socially and economically," Mr Black said.

He said the smaller independent stores and specialty shops were going to continue to struggle for the rest of the year, while the large discount chains were expected to continue to do well.

"There is certainly a significant number of retailers who have found the environment very challenging and that will almost certainly result in the reduction of workforce or their hours," Mr Black said.

Russo Recruitment's Denise Love said that among the reasons for the rocketing level of youth unemployment were

poor career guidance and that they felt overwhelmed or defeated before they started.

"They have to be prepared to commit to some training or education or they can expect to be unemployed for a long time," Ms Love said.

"If they don't do something they can become disengaged."

She said there were alternatives to academic study and steps that could be taken that were very successful in getting people a job. Young people often did not want to listen to parents, "so they have to stop pandering to them. Make it tough for them so they have to get out and do something".

Treasurer Andrew Fraser admitted the youth jobless figure was "extraordinarily high", but below the national average of 21.4 per cent.

He said governments were fighting against "a dynamic where young people will suffer

most at the start of a recession".

"The real tragedy to be avoided is the potential for young people to find themselves in a spiral of unemployment and getting disconnected from the labour market," he said. "It's all of us that bear the cost."

He said the real danger was that the disconnection could eventually lead to mental and physical health problems, social isolation and homelessness and issues of dependency.

"The biggest problem is a lack of options rather than a lack of guidance," he said.

The State Government has adopted programs targeted at youth, including its Green Army, First Start and Get Set for Work.

While the economy shows signs of improvement industries are not yet confident enough to employ full-time workers of any age.