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Labour Force figures showing region is yet to blink

The latest ABS Regional Labour Force data for March 2023, reveals the region's labour force (those in work or looking for work) has grown to more than 400,000 for the very first time.

The region's peak industry body, **Business Hunter** believes the Hunter's employment market is showing continuing resilience, despite the mixed economic news now emerging.

Unemployment rates have remained low, with the Hunter Valley dropping to 4.2 per cent from 5.4 per cent in February, and Newcastle and Lake Macquarie easing to 3.4 per cent, up from 2.5 per cent in February.

Business Hunter CEO, Bob Hawes said the rates were comparatively low, noting the NSW figure was 3.3 percent for the same period.

"It shows the labour market is still tight at a time when the Jobs and Skills Australia Internet Job Vacancy figures are also maintaining a level at around 6,000, which is about twice the monthly number we experienced pre-covid," said Mr Hawes.

"The participation rate has increased to a record high of 73.7 percent across Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, well above the 66.5% figure of March 2020. This really shows a high rate of utility in terms of pool of the population we can draw our workforce from," Mr Hawes added.

The Hunter Valley participation rate (66.3 per cent) remains softer compared to pre-covid levels of around 65 per cent, despite an increase in the number of people employed. Mr Hawes said this was a factor of the growth in population in the Hunter Valley of over 20,000 that had occurred since March 2020.

"It's also worth noting there was a big jump of around 10,000 in the number of people employed full time in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, whereas the decline of 3,600 full time roles in the Hunter Valley was offset by a jump in part time work of 3,100 roles," said Mr Hawes.

Mr Hawes said the NSW government would no doubt be looking at these figures and the trends very closely.

"Business Hunter is aware there are sectors that are doing it tough and have been looking closely at their staffing, but buoyancy in other industries and sectors is clearly accommodating the fluidity in the market at present," said Mr Hawes.

“The volatility in the Hunter Valley figures is reflective of similar circumstances across January and February, but the figures do not show the need to ring alarm bells just yet,” said Mr Hawes.

Youth employment (15 - 24 years) statistics were still moving around from month to month, with the overall youth unemployment rate remaining well below 10 per cent.

“Youth unemployment in the Hunter Valley dropped to 7.8 per cent from 9.3 per cent in February, whilst in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie it jumped from 2.8 per cent in February to 8.8 per cent in March, not untypical of the recent volatility in this figure,” said Mr Hawes.

The monthly employment figures for March reveal the pool of unemployed continues to hover around 15,000 people, or about two and a half times the number of job ads that were out there.

“The monthly figures show there are 7,600 youth looking for work, an increase on the 5,500 in February, yet still well below the 9,400 that were in the market pre-covid, in March 2020,” said Mr Hawes.

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