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Record low unemployment for Newcastle

The average annual unemployment figures for Newcastle and Lake Macquarie have hit an all-time low of 3 per cent since the ABS Regional Labour Force data series commenced in 1999.

The average unemployment rate for females has fallen to just 2.6 per cent, also a record low, observes the region's peak industry body **Business Hunter**.

Business Hunter CEO, Bob Hawes said the region's employment market had remained strong, continuing to buck the national trend of softening.

"At the surface, the regional labour force market continues to defy gravity, remaining strong despite some sectors of business experiencing a slow down as consumer and business-to-business demand softens. Clearly, if people are losing their jobs, they are finding new work again pretty quickly," he said.

The monthly unemployment rate for Lake Macquarie and Newcastle dropped to 2.8 per cent from 2.9 per cent in April, whilst the rate eased in the Hunter Valley, rising to 2.5 per cent from 1.7 per cent in April, representing a regional pool of 10,800 people looking for work.

The monthly rate across the entire Hunter region eased to 2.7 per cent, up from 2.4 per cent in April but is still well below the National figure of 3.6 per cent and the NSW rate of 3 per cent - itself a record-equalling low rate since 1978.

Mr Hawes said the data also revealed that the majority of the growth across the month occurred in full-time roles.

"This indicates to us that businesses are seeking to retain staff, and the region's workforce is perhaps looking for more hours and stability as cost-of-living pressures begin to bite. We certainly don't appear to be suffering from underemployment typical in other parts of the nation at present," said Mr Hawes.

Mr Hawes said the rates were set against a background of the Jobs and Skills Australia Internet Job Vacancy numbers rising to 6,900, an increase of around 200 from April 2023.

"Whilst the Hunter region's businesses seeking to employ people keep pumping the job ads, with a 6.8 per cent increase over the last 12 months, we're seeing the opposite at the state and national level. Over the same period, there were monthly and annual declines in ads of

2.9 per cent and 4.2 per cent respectively at the national level, and 2.6 per cent and 9.6 per cent respectively for NSW,” said Mr Hawes.

Mr Hawes said the monthly figures continue to show there is still volatility in the employment market, but we were well and truly in a trend of continuing strong demand.

“This is expressed by businesses advertising to attract workers, but having access to a very small pool of people with the potential to fill those roles. It is a frustrating time for business as we are also constrained from freely attracting more labour into the region owing to the well-publicised shortages of housing to rent or buy,” Mr Hawes added.

The participation rates across the region remain strong, with Newcastle and Lake Macquarie staying above record highs at over 70 per cent, and a jump in the Hunter Valley to 64.6 per cent, which is around the levels experience pre Covid.

Mr Hawes said the youth unemployment (15 to 24 year old) picture is also remaining strong, with the monthly average unemployment rate for the region at 7.9 per cent.

“Youth unemployment in the Hunter Valley increased slightly to 8.4 per cent, and this could be due to seasonal factors as we came off the Easter break and school holidays in April where typically there is an increase in demand in casual roles for youth,” said Mr Hawes.

The monthly figures show there are 6,400 youth looking for work, an increase on 5,700 in April, yet still well below the nearly 10,000 that were in the market pre-covid, in March 2020.

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