

Sunday, 1 April 2012

Woolworths-Government *Fresh Start Agreement* is a promising development for secure jobs: unions

A new agreement between the federal Government and retail giant Woolworths to create 10,000 new jobs this year must be accompanied by measures to ensure these are secure jobs and not just transient, casual positions, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney congratulated Woolworths for its initiative but said there must be assurances that the majority of positions created will be permanent, secure jobs that lead to full careers in retail.

Woolworths and the Government today announced a memorandum of understanding in which Woolworths will be provided with streamlined access to a range of government job-matching and training services to help it achieve its target of 10,000 new jobs this financial year.

Ms Kearney said Woolworths was showing corporate leadership by particularly seeking to increase employment of groups of disadvantaged Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“Woolworths recognises that the pathway to sustainable, secure jobs and careers – and to better productivity - is through skills and training, and unions commend the company for its commitment to these values,” Ms Kearney said.

“The retail sector has an over-reliance on casual employment and insecure work, so we intend to monitor the implementation of this *Fresh Start Agreement* to ensure it lives up to its promise to deliver secure jobs.

“Woolworths main rival, Coles, has reaped the benefits of restructuring its workforce so that a clear majority are now permanent.

“Three years ago, 70-80% of Coles’ employees were casuals, sometimes working as little as one shift a month.

“But in the past three years, a new management culture has altered that so today only about 30% of its 87,000 employees are casual.

“While this is still too high, the results of this conversion of the workforce have been reduced staff turnover, lower absenteeism, improved staff engagement, better productivity and higher profits.

“Other major companies can learn from the Coles’ experience, and it is to be hoped that this new initiative by Woolworths will be accompanied by a similar approach.

“Having said that, all the signs are promising at this stage.”

Ms Kearney said that with 40% of Australians in casual, labour hire, contract and other forms of insecure work, unions were interested in working with innovative employers to produce secure jobs.

More information is available at www.securejobs.org.au

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