



TREASURER



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EMBARGO

STATEMENT BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER AND TREASURER,  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD, MP

RETRENCHMENT OF 170 BURRAGORANG VALLEY COAL MINERS

The Miners' Federation's flat rejection of the overwhelming decision by Burragorang Valley coal miners to avoid the sacking of 170 men by sharing their jobs over a four day working week, shows exactly what is wrong with the leadership of too many Australian unions.

Mr Howard said the Burragorang Valley miners, in opting for a four day working week, accepted the fact that 80 per cent of something is better than 100 per cent of nothing.

The Burragorang miners considered that the Australian principle of mateship, of sharing the burden, is more important than protecting the high wages of those in jobs at the expense of the 170 men who would thereby lose their jobs.

The reality is that the local coal industry is suffering from a squeeze on revenue due to reduced overseas demand and higher production costs resulting from recent wage rises and massively increased New South Wales Government transport and handling charges.

The Burragorang Valley miners understand this situation, having already seen two of their district's mines close earlier in the year.

It is incredible that the Miners' Federation should justify the rejection of the Burraborang Valley miners' decision by saying, "There will be no sharing of poverty".

In fact, the miners involved would effectively be reducing their average weekly earnings for a day shift from \$469.35 per week, to \$375.48 per week and for a night shift from \$550.60 to \$440.48 per week - a far better wage than most Australian workers earn in a five day week.

This selfish and irresponsible decision by the Central Council of the Miners' Federation means that those who are secure in their jobs are cold bloodedly depriving 170 of their fellow miners of their right to work.

Unless the attitude of unions like the Miners' Federation is changed, it is inevitable that the impact of the world recession on Australia will lead to further considerable job losses.

These could be avoided, and the ability of employees to take on more workers would be enhanced, if in the present difficult circumstances, union leaders accepted the principles of a wage pause and job sharing.

CANBERRA

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