

Dear Senators,

Thank you for considering my submission to this enquiry.

I am currently employed as an engineer in GM Holden's Engineering department.

Like most of my engineering colleagues, I will be made redundant at the end of June 2020. My submission is my own personal reflection on the impact of the closure of GM Holden's operations. My submission does not represent GM Holden's point of view and does not necessarily represent the view of my fellow employees.

Noting the Terms of Reference of this enquiry, my submission will consist of comments and observations related to these elements of the Terms:

"(a) the impacts of that decision on:

(i) Holden employees,

...

(iii) the Holden research and development facilities

...

(c) Government or other policy settings on manufacturing, research and development, business support and transition, and employee support; and

(d) any related matters."

On 20 August 2018, GM President Mark Reuss visited Holden to announce GM's intention to hire an additional 150 Australian engineers to work on GM product development projects. He specifically mentioned that GM considered asking for Government assistance with this. He told us that the company considered that it was easier to go without asking for assistance. I can only interpret this as a reflection on the GM's perception of Australian Government support for Research and Development.

No warning was given to Holden staff about the potential closure of the business and there was no request from Holden management for staff to make any contribution to avoid the closure. Given the recent growth of the Holden Engineering team, the announcement of the closure of Holden operations was a complete shock. On the day of the closure announcement, 8 new engineers commenced employment at Holden. Perhaps nothing better illustrates how unprepared we were for this announcement.

At 10:30 AM on 17 February 2020, the following email was sent to all staff:

"Holden welcomes Julian Blissett, GM Senior Vice President and President GM International Operations.

Join us for an All Employee Meeting at 12:30 today, Monday 17 February. You'll have the opportunity to hear Julian's update on GM globally and Holden specifically, with a Q&A session to finish.

We encourage you to get involved and bring any burning questions you have!"

I spent the afternoon following the announcement with a whirl of emotions going through my head. Anger wasn't one of them until I saw the following comments by the Prime Minister and the Industry Minister on the evening TV news:

Scott Morrison: "Australian taxpayers put billions into this, into this multinational company and they let the brand just wither away on their watch."

Karen Andrews: "...I don't think it's acceptable for Holden to have made this decision without any consultation with government and without significant advice of that decision."

I was left with the impression that the Ministers cared more about being out of the loop than they did about the employees impacted by the decision.

In 2014, the Federal and State governments announced a \$155 million "Growth fund" would include funds to train employees who were losing their jobs as a result of the closure of manufacturing operation in Australia. Now that the majority of the remainder of the Holden workforce is to be made redundant, there seems to be no Government support for these employees. I don't know whether this is because the Government does not care about white-collar workers or whether the previously allocated money was exhausted prematurely.

Research and Development impacts:

Holden's Engineering team has recently been involved in multiple projects as part of GM's focus on electric and autonomous vehicles.

This work on Advanced Vehicle Development projects is at the forefront of new vehicle technology development. I am saddened that Australia will lose this capability.

Other losses to the community as a result of Holden's closure:

- Holden has been recognised multiple times as an Employer of Choice for Women. In March 2017, Holden Managing Director Mark Bernhard announced plans to achieve 50/50 gender parity within 5 years. I can't think of too many other employers of engineers who are this forward-looking.
- Holden has consistently allowed for flexible working arrangements for both men and women. This has enabled the company to retain skilled staff while allowing them to support their families.

Thank you.