

Geoscientist Unemployment Rate doubles

The unemployment rate for geoscientists in Australia doubled in the six months to 31 December 2012 as a direct result of the downturn in Australia's mining fortunes in the second half of the year.

This was the result of the geoscientist employment survey released (7 January 2013) by the Australian Institute of Geoscientists (AIG), which said the plight of its members was compounded with a rise in the number of professionals who were unable to secure their preferred professional work levels.

AIG said the survey, conducted during the fourth quarter of 2012, confirmed that unemployment and underemployment amongst Australia's geoscientists is again on the rise.

The latest geoscientist unemployment rate of 6.1% is a sharp increase from the corresponding figure for the Q2 2012 survey of 2.9%, while the underemployment rate (geoscientists in work but unable to secure their desired level of employment) climbed to 7.8% from 5.2% at the end of June last year, AIG said.

The rate at which unemployment and underemployment is increasing also accelerated sharply during the quarter, while the level of unemployment and underemployment varied markedly by state.

Western Australia reported the best conditions with 5.2% unemployment and 4.4% underemployment.

In New South Wales, unemployment of 4.2% and underemployment of 13% contrasted with the corresponding figures for Queensland of 12% and 4.6% respectively. Queensland has the highest combined unemployment and underemployment rate amongst all Australian states, interpreted to be largely due to the recent downturn in the state's metallurgical and thermal coal industries.

Some 83% of survey respondents engaged in the energy resources sector (coal, coal seam gas and petroleum) work in Queensland. Respondents working primarily in Tasmania and the Northern Territory reported full employment. In Victoria and South Australia, no unemployment was reported, but the underemployment rates recorded were 14.3% and 16.7% respectively.

Critically, AIG said the survey results "support anecdotal evidence that exploration activity which delivers the discoveries needed to sustain Australia's mineral resources industries is declining".

Some 67% of survey respondents work in the metalliferous mineral exploration sector. A further 13% of respondents work in metalliferous mining while 7.5% work

in energy resource (coal, natural gas and petroleum) exploration and production.

Almost 65% of unemployed geoscientists lost their positions during Q4 2012. A further 24% lost their positions during Q2 2012 and were unable to regain employment during Q4. Unemployment was most pronounced amongst geoscientists with five years or less experience (33%) and between five and 10 years experience (27%). While three quarters of unemployed geoscientists responding to the survey expressed confidence in regaining employment within the next six months, a further 20% were actively seeking long term employment outside the geoscience profession.

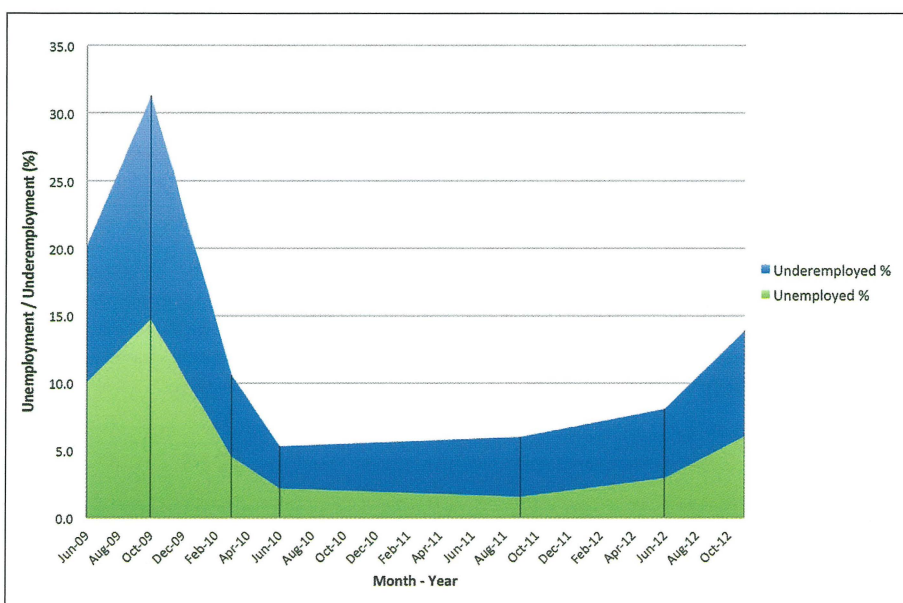
On a positive note, 5.7% of respondents returned to full-time employment after a period of unemployment or underemployment. But 15% of respondents were not confident of retaining their employment for the next three months and only 51% were confident of remaining employed for the next 12 months.

AIG said, "unfortunately, geoscientists, particularly those employed in mineral and energy resource exploration, appear to very much be the 'canaries in the coal mine' by being first to feel the impact of any downturn in resource sector activity".

In terms of demographics, 40% of Australian geoscientists currently work in Western Australia, followed by 20% in Queensland, 9.2% in New South Wales and the ACT, 4.8% in Victoria, 4.2% in South Australia and 1.4% in the Northern Territory. Of the respondents, 21% work overseas, with Africa (5.5%), South America (2.7%), Canada and Papua New Guinea (both 2.4%) the most significant destinations. The level of geoscientists employed overseas was higher than the 15% in Q2 2012 but down from the 24% recorded in Q2 2011.

Some 16% of respondents to the survey are employed on a long-distance commute basis – the first time this information has been collected in this series of employment surveys.

AIG first commenced this survey in August 2009 with additional surveys following at regular intervals. It said all Australian geoscientists are encouraged to participate to help ensure that results are as representative and reliable as possible. ■



Unemployment and underemployment of geoscientists increased sharply during 2012.