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Bonus bounties for in-demand workers

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SKILLS SHORTAGE

Bonus bounties for in-demand workers

Andrew Taylor

Desperate employers are offering haircuts, drinks vouchers, free food and cash signing bonuses up to \$10,000 to attract staff, amid Australia's worsening skills shortage.

Eight-day fortnights and gym memberships are also on offer, as the shortage of workers expands to more than 280 occupations. Some businesses have been forced to cut trading hours, drop qualification requirements and hire workers without resumes because of a lack of candidates.

The federal government's skills priority list, released last week, showed the number of occupations in shortage rose from 153 to 286 over the past year. Teachers, abattoir workers, bus drivers and beauty salon managers are among the new occupations lacking workers.

Motor mechanics, retail managers, chefs, cooks and electricians are among jobs suffering the largest shortages.

Motor Traders' Association of NSW head of government relations Collin Jennings said there was a deficit of more than 30,000 workers in the motor industry, including mechanics, body repairs and auto electricians.

"Many qualified employees are having to return to the tools in their previous roles in the back-end to fill the shortages," he said. "This then leads to insufficient front-end staff such as sales and service managers."

Jennings said the skills shortage will worsen as the industry seeks qualified professionals trained to service and repair electric vehicles.

CMR Automotive owner Cameron Virtue said he has been working up to 80 hours a week to cover staffing gaps at his garages in Leichhardt and Marrickville despite pay rates rising sharply.

"We have a three-month backlog on our more complex mechanical work as we can't find staff with the in-depth knowledge required to complete these

jobs," he said.

Virtue said the skills shortage was exacerbated by TAFE and private colleges not preparing apprentices "for what the real life of a mechanic entails".

Master Electricians Australia advocacy and policy manager Jason O'Dwyer said the national shortage of electricians is expected to worsen following the transition to renewables.

"Some employers won't allow their apprentices to pick up orders from warehouses to prevent them from being poached by rival businesses," he said.

O'Dwyer predicted a shortfall of 25,000 electricians by 2030, with electricians, solar electricians, air-conditioning and refrigeration the hardest positions to fill.

"We've seen employers offer some surprising incentives, such as eight-day and nine-day fortnights, gym memberships, haircuts, nights out with their partner, as well as referral and sign on bonuses, which range from \$1000 to \$10,000," he said.

Pubs and restaurants are also luring workers with cash and other incentives.

The Sydney Restaurant Group is offering \$5000 sign-on bonuses and free

wine courses for managers, waiters, bartenders, baristas, chefs and kitchen staff at venues including Ormeggio at The Spit, Aqua Dining in Milsons Point and Cafe Bondi.

The Australian Venue Co., which operates venues such as The Winery, Bungalow 8 and Cargo, is offering paid training, a \$100 pub voucher, free lunch and gift bag to successful applicants at "casting calls" in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

Solotel last year began offering sign-on bonuses up to \$1000 and half-price food and drinks at venues such as Opera Bar, the Golden Sheaf and the Bank to

new employees.

Solotel chief executive Elliot Solomon said the incentives program had "contributed enormously" to recruiting staff.

The hospitality group also brought forward the minimum wage increase for eligible staff to July rather than October 1 as the government required.

Restaurant and Catering Australia chief executive Belinda Clarke said hospitality workers were being paid "well above" normal award rates, with junior chefs attracting more than \$100,000 a year.

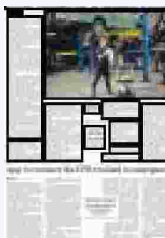
"One kitchen hand in WA was poached by the mines for \$150,000 a year as well," she said. "For baristas, it's now normal for them to make around \$60 an hour on weekends."

But United Workers Union executive director Dario Mujkic said hospitality remains an industry where workers are low-paid and poorly treated despite some venues offering sign-on bonuses and other incentives.

"Hospitality employers can't fill jobs because the industry expects workers to work unsociable hours on low wages with no job security," he said.

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Master Electricians Australia's Jason O'Dwyer



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**Apprentice
Xanthe Ba Pe at
CMR Automotive.**
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