

FILE

McKell Building
2-24 Rawson Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Telephone 02 9372 8877
Facsimile 02 9372 7070
TTY 1300 301 181 (toll free)

ABN 48 922 066 182
www.commerce.nsw.gov.au

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Dr S Ozdowski
Acting Disability Discrimination Commissioner
Human Rights Commissioner
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
GPO Box 5218
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Dr Ozdowski

I refer to your letter of 4 March 2005 in which you invite the NSW Department of Commerce to comment on a series of Issues Papers that have been prepared by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for the Inquiry into Employment and Disability.

The NSW Department of Commerce is the government agency whose role is to make doing business in NSW simple and fair for all concerned and achieve best value for the NSW Government through our services and activities. The Department comprises the former Departments of Public Works and Services, Fair Trading and Industrial Relations as well as the former Office of Information Technology.

As an employer, the Department is committed to improving opportunities for current and potential employees with disabilities and has in place an Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan and a Disability Action Plan that is reported on annually. Through both these initiatives, the Department has sought to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to gain permanent and meaningful employment and expanded career opportunities. At present, there are 389 people with disabilities who work for the Department. This represents 10 percent of our entire workforce and compares favourably with the 7 percent currently employed in the NSW public sector. Having said this, the Department's representation of people with disabilities is slightly below the NSW Government benchmark of 12 percent.

To increase representation to the State Government's benchmark level, the Department will progress strategies such as targeting positions, improving physical access to its premises, raising awareness of issues affecting people with disabilities among staff and managers, removing barriers to recruitment, and a number of other measures aimed at ensuring the target is met.

You might be interested to know that the Department already has a range of measures currently in place for staff with disabilities. The Department's Disability Network provides staff development activities and networking for staff with disabilities. The Diversity and Equity Unit within the Department also provides advice and consultation to management about equitable recruitment practices and workplace adjustments.

The Department's Reasonable Adjustment Policy objective is to ensure that work-related adjustments are made to meet the needs of staff with disabilities and increase their retention and development. These adjustments include providing equipment or adaptive technologies, changes to the design of the work environment or the job, changes to work practices to make them more flexible, and safe access to and within the workplace.

The Department is a strong supporter of and active participant in Government sponsored employment programs that aim to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Through programs such as the NSW Apprenticeship Program for People with Disabilities and the Traineeship Program for People with Disabilities, the Department and other Government agencies have been able to increase the representation of people with disabilities as well as enhance their capacity to customise products and services to people with disabilities.

On the issue of statistics and the impact of equality of opportunity in employment for people with disabilities, the Department is of the view that sound data collection is essential for planning and evaluating strategies that aim to improve equity and achieve positive outcomes for all equity groups including people with disabilities. The Department is required under Government policy to ensure its workforce is representative of the community it serves and that strategies are in place to ensure that Government set benchmarks are met.

If the Department can be of further assistance to the Inquiry process, Mr Ben Folino can be contacted on 9338 8954.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.

Yours sincerely



D B O'Connor

30.3.05

Acting Director-General