

Newsletter

AUSTRALIAN EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMY 1980S TO PRESENT

As I reflect on Australia's economic and employment history from the 1980s to today, I'm gobbed smacked by a story of resilience overshadowed by persistent struggles, recessions, mining booms, and soaring living costs that have shaped a challenging landscape. This newsletter explores how these shifts affected Australians' lives, how we've managed to provide for ourselves amidst these challenges. With governments failing to act, I'm convinced that only by relying on each other can we ensure all Australians thrive in this wonderful country of ours.

A TIME OF TRANSITION



The 1980s the Hawke Keating reforms, like floating the dollar and deregulating finance, opened Australia to the world, but not without pain. In 1982 to 1983 recession hit hard, with unemployment spiking to 10%. I think it must have been tough for families, especially with many relying on a single income. Yet, by the late 1980s, unemployment dropped to 6%, and the service sector and mining started creating jobs. Women began joining the workforce in greater numbers, especially in part-time roles, which started reshaping family dynamics.

BUMPS AND RECOVERY

The early 1990s recession Keating's "recession we had to have" feels like a low point. Unemployment hit 10.8%, which was devastating for many families and individuals. But the recovery, with enterprise bargaining and a growing service sector, seems like a testament to Australia's resilience. By the late 1990s, unemployment was down to 6%, and I think this shift toward flexibility gave workers more options, especially women balancing family and careers.

The 1990s did also however mark the start of housing becoming a real challenge. Incomes grew \$1,361 weekly per household by 1995 and 1996-96 but house prices started outpacing them. I find it frustrating that policies meant to help, like tax breaks, began pushing homeownership out of reach for some, just like the present day.

For families in this time dual income households became a lifeline. With superannuation kicking in, people started planning for the future, but renters and low-income families were still feeling the pinch.



BOOM AND BARRIERS

The 2000s mining boom feels like a golden era in some ways, unemployment dropped to 5.25% by 2009, and GDP grew steadily. Manufacturing took a hit, and I think those workers must have felt left behind. The boom created wealth, but it also seems to have fueled inequality.

Living Costs and Impact in this time was when housing became a crisis. Prices grew at 6% a year while incomes lagged at 3%. Policies like negative gearing seem to me like they helped investors more than first-time buyers, pushing debt to 120% of GDP.

I can imagine the stress for renters and young families, with a third of households locked out of homeownership. It makes me question why the system favoured property investors over everyday Australians.

The 2000s show Australians working harder to keep up hours worked jumped 4.6% in 2023 alone. This has taken a toll on people's health and essential family time. Yes the boom brought high paying jobs, but I think the rising cost of essentials like food and energy hit low income households hardest.

MOUNTING PRESSURES FROM 2010 TO NOW

The economy's resilience, with \$1.98 trillion GDP by 2021 is good but the cracks are clear. Unemployment has stayed low, but underemployment and post-COVID challenges feel like a hidden burden. We have seen a massive increase in poverty at 30% shows that not everyone benefits equally. The cost of living crisis since 2019 feels relentless and its exhausting and unfair to hard working Australians or any Australian trying to get ahead. Inflation hit a 33 year high in 2022 and 2023, and essentials like food and housing jumped 11 to 36%. Houses now cost 8 times more than salaries are earned, which is ridiculous. Homelessness rose 14% from 2011 to 2016, and I can't imagine the stress for the 53% of households struggling financially. It makes me worry for our young children, will they ever be able to own their own home?

Australians are stretched thin, angry and exhausted, we are all working longer hours and sacrificing health and relationships. Mortgage stress and rental hikes feel like a trap for many. Government grants for first time buyers seem ok, but let's be real, they've just inflated prices further, benefiting those already in the market. It's the same old story: the rich get richer, and the rest of us are left scraping by.

My final thoughts, Looking back on Australia's economic and employment history since the 1980s, I'm far from impressed the so called economic resilience rings hollow when housing costs have skyrocketed, inequality continues to widen, and work life balance is eroding for so many.

The late 1990s to early 2000s, a time of affordable housing and better balance, feels like a distant memory, and without bold reforms, I'm skeptical of improvement. Successive governments, regardless of party, have consistently failed to tackle systemic issues like unaffordable housing, growing wealth gaps, and declining quality of life, prioritising policies that favour investors and control over the needs of everyday Australians. This inaction points to a grim future: if unchanged, these trends will trap most of us in precarious, debt ridden lives while only the wealthiest thrive. Breaking this cycle demands scrapping investor friendly tax breaks, massively expanding social housing, and prioritising equitable wealth distribution reforms this being said I doubt we'll see this from parliaments anytime soon.

In these trying times, with governments failing to act, Australians must rely on each other, sharing resources, advocating for affordable housing, building mutual aid networks, and fostering community care to ensure all Australians can thrive in this wonderful country of ours.

Yours sincerely,

The Streamline Admin Team

Helping Australian businesses run better every day.

