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Media, marketing and the dole cruisers - a welfare discourse case study

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MEDIA, MARKETING AND THE DOLE CRUISERS

– A WELFARE DISCOURSE CASE STUDY

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree**

MASTER OF ARTS – RESEARCH (JOURNALISM)

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

GARETH ROBINSON

FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

2010

Certification

I, Gareth Robinson, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (Journalism), in the School of Journalism and Creative Writing, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document and associated audio recording have not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Gareth Robinson

November 2010

Abstract

Over the past two decades there has been an increasing policy focus on the obligations of unemployed Australians to seek work in return for unemployment benefits. Simultaneously, government has emphasised that the integrity of the national welfare system depends on vigorous pursuit of those who abuse taxpayer-funded support. In 2002 the Australian government announced what it said were unprecedented research findings that identified the prevalence of unemployed people who exploited welfare support and avoided their obligations to seek work. Through use of social marketing techniques, researchers produced an attitudinal segmentation of job seekers and thus provided government with the means, in effect, to conduct the first head count of dole bludgers. In line with the novel nature of this development, the government applied a new nomenclature to the research population; the dole bludgers were renamed as dole cruisers and it was in these terms that their existence was brought to public attention via the media.

Although the media has played a significant role in presenting stories about aspects of the welfare system, there has been little detailed scrutiny of media participation in welfare discourses in Australia, particularly those relating to welfare fraud. For this reason, analysis of media presentations of the government's dole cruiser story provides additional information about media contributions to the development of welfare discourse in the public sphere.

Through discourse analysis of media texts and related analysis of research reports and internal government documents obtained through a freedom of information process, this thesis demonstrates previously unreported findings. In particular, the thesis finds that media reports that more than 100,000 Australians were dole bludgers in 2002 were incorrect and based on invalid official data and misleading government statements. Further, no journalists identified the central error in the government claims or raised questions about the policy implications indicated by the alleged prevalence of a significant number of rorters in a welfare system that featured stringent administrative controls based on the policy known as mutual obligation. With several significant exceptions, media reporting of the dole cruiser case lacked scepticism and endorsed a government agenda that linked unemployment to moral deficiencies in individual people.

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The protracted but ultimately rewarding process of researching and completing this thesis owes much to my parents, Tom and Ruth Robinson, who laid the foundations; to my supervisor Dr David Blackall for his advice and encouragement over a period of years; and to my wife Libby O'Donnell, for her support in this, as in all things.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

After a six-year period in power that included a continuous punitive policy focus on allegedly idle unemployed people, the Australian government led by Prime Minister John Howard found a new way to tell an old story about those recipients of unemployment benefits known in popular vernacular as dole bludgers. As the responsible minister suggested, lazy State-funded jobless people were a given, but an unquantified one. According to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, everybody knew about dole bludgers, but nobody really knew how many there were. The minister, though, now had the numbers:

There has always been a certain amount of anecdotal evidence about [them]; however, this is the first genuine research that I am aware of that confirms the existence of a substantial body of non-performers in Australia. (Brough, 2002a)

The story the Government told about these ‘non-performers’ was paradoxical because it contained information that was simultaneously familiar and unprecedented, generic and unheard of. The story was told in a conventional political vernacular but also contained terms that were linguistically novel. It was presented as both revelation – the first actual quantification of the work shy – and prediction, because the Government’s story also contained a description of what purported to be the community’s reaction towards these newly numbered bludgers.

This was the story of the dole cruisers. Its elements of construction included social marketing, government and media relations, social policy, language, empiricism, and scepticism. In the terms of this thesis, however, the dole cruiser story is primarily an account of what the news media did – and what it failed to do – in presenting the story to the Australian public.

The central argument of this thesis is that the story the media relayed to the community contained both misrepresentation and falsehood and that the news media failed to discern this, although in a minority of cases failure was qualified by a degree of scepticism about the information provided by the government. Overall, this failure was a product of media culture, of ideologies of organisation and practice, coupled with the influences of an ideological consensus involving journalists and their sources concerning the nature and causes of unemployment and, more broadly, relationships between individuals and the State. Additionally, the dole cruiser story represented a failure of analysis at a basic level. Journalism's self image – based on notions of scepticism, empiricism and interrogation – proved, at least in this case, to be transparently self deceiving for journalists and ultimately misleading for recipients of the reporting.

1.2 (derogatory) any person on social security benefits

The dole bludger has a place in Australian culture that is in some ways analogous with the rabbit. Each is widely regarded as a pest and each has been subjected to a series of attempts at eradication. Governments have sought to limit the proliferation of one with

disease and physical barriers and to control the other with punitive policies and critical statements. The rabbit is a successful coloniser, far removed from Europe but retaining links to its English past that feature, for example, in some children's literature in Australia. The dole bludger also has old-world predecessors but is simultaneously an Australian original – part of an authentic vernacular drama but equally capable of being considered 'un-Australian'. Bludger and beast are both fringe dwellers and central actors in national narratives about the land and how to live in it.

Unlike the rabbit, the dole bludger is – at least in linguistic terms – a relatively recent arrival in Australia's socio-political ecology. The Macquarie Dictionary defines the term as a colloquialism representing either someone who lives on social security benefits without making proper attempts to find work, or a derogatory reference to any recipient of such benefits.

Since the mid 1970s, the dole bludger has made frequent and repetitive appearances on national and local stages, mainly as a result of the combined efforts of political and media forces.

Despite the frequency of this representation, to my knowledge there has been little detailed analysis of Australian media depictions of the dole bludger or indeed other characters with roles in social welfare issues. For this reason, this case study covers not only the media role in the development of a particular story but also the processes and agendas within government and the private sector that contributed to the empirical basis

and political context for that story. The thesis is premised on the notion that adequate analysis of the journalism requires scrutiny of what preceded and informed it. Thus the narrative includes an account of the specific origins of the dole cruiser as a product of social marketers in New Zealand in the 1990s, and the development of an Australian version of the product from 2000.

The thesis comprises this written text, an appendix containing documents including a government media release and internal government ministerial briefing notes, and a CD recording of a 45-minute program made by this writer for the ABC Radio National program Background Briefing. In part, the program concerns the development of the dole cruiser story as an element of unemployment policy implemented by the Howard government.

It is suggested that examiners listen to the CD at this point before reading the remainder of the dissertation.

1.3 Methodology

The analytical component of the thesis draws on media theory and discourse analysis. Included among the principal sources underpinning the work is Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model of journalism; this holds that the operations of news media are informed and influenced by symbiotic relationships with elite interests. If the notion of an independent, sceptical and inquiring media that serves public interests can be summed up

by the phrase ‘without fear or favour’, then the propaganda model can be said to invert this notion – in Chomsky and Herman’s view, the media favours elite interests and fears the loss of benefits provided by its proximity to those interests.

Additionally, the thesis draws on Golding and Middleton’s work on welfare discourses within the British media, and Van Dijk’s application of discourse analysis to news media. In each case, the conceptual framework is one of ideology. Journalistic method and motive are seen to occur or operate within an ideological context in which certain sectional or narrow interests are dominant. Most particularly, my analysis of the construction of the dole cruiser story is informed by van Dijk’s statement about the rationale for a discourse analysis methodology – that the methodological focus is ‘interested in the systematic relationships between text and context’ and, further, that it ‘wants to know how...discourse structures influenced and are influenced by the social situation’ (1988, p 30).

Most teaching of journalism, as Windschuttle (1995, p 2) suggests, is based upon an idea of journalism involving a commitment to reporting the truth about what happens in the world. This commitment is based on a realist view and an empirical methodology. The truth is not theoretical but available in the world; it can be sought, found, tested, corroborated and communicated to others. This view of the practice of journalism is one that is shared by its practitioners. For Australian journalists, the very first point in their union’s code of ethics is predicated on a primary goal of truth telling, with an exhortation to report and interpret honestly and accurately (Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance 2005) To varying degrees, the Australian news media also explicitly stakes a claim for

truth by at times acknowledging moments when truth is not achieved – mistakes are admitted, corrections published or broadcast.

Truth – the idea of it and the quest for it – therefore lies at the ideological heart of this realist, empiricist view of journalism. According to this view, the goal is truth and the noun here is unbounded by syntactical fencing; the goal is not *a* truth or *the* truth or even *the whole truth and nothing but the truth*.

The research method involved identifying and analysing articles from a sample of 15 metropolitan and regional newspapers. Journalists employed by the newspapers wrote some of the reports, in some cases under their own by-lines; in some cases, the Australian Associated Press (AAP) news agency produced versions of the story that were subsequently published, in part or full, in some of the sample newspapers. The methodology also included acquisition and analysis of an Australian government news release and publicly available reports produced by public and private sector sources. A series of applications under federal freedom of information legislation was used to obtain government documents including ministerial briefing notes and internal government communications. The thesis was informed by telephone interviews with protagonists involved in the production of source material.

It should be emphasised at this point that while the thesis will describe aspects of the development of the dole cruiser story, it can not claim to be a complete account of the

processes that culminated in a number of newspaper reports during a single week in May 2002.

1.4 A research problem

As noted, the research design is based on the notion that a fuller analysis of the media coverage of the dole cruiser story would depend on acquisition and consideration of as much information as possible concerning relevant developments leading up to the actual reporting of the story.

However there are limits to the collection of comprehensive information. In this case, these limits included federal freedom of information laws (and government interpretations of those laws) restricting the ability of public servants to disclose information to people outside government. In addition, commercial in confidence provisions were attached to contractual arrangements between private sector researchers and a government department.

Chapter 2

2.1 The literature

Golding and Middleton's study of welfare discourses in Britain in the 1970s is widely considered to be landmark research. The work drew on very deep roots. The authors suggested that centuries-old ideas about poverty and the poor continued to retain power and exert influence in modern times. The deserving and undeserving poor of the late 20th century were, in effect, direct descendants of two separate but linked classes – those who were God's poor and those who were the Devil's (1982, p 9). Underlying this dichotomy were equally old ideas about social and political management of key relationships, including that between the individual and the State and the individual and the labour market. The poor could be, variously, recipients of charitable good works done by their economic and moral superiors, and a threat to the economic and political order if they became too numerous.

Categorising the poor was not, however, an easy thing and raised questions about the virtue of those in poverty and also, by implication, about those who contributed to the categorisations. As Golding and Middleton saw it, 'imprecise distinctions between criminality and destitution left a murky area of inexact morality' (1982, p 10).

Moral ambiguities did not prevent the development in 16th century England of responses to poverty that were based as much on ideas about the motives and attitudes of those who endured that condition, as on the interests of the classes who controlled property and

power. Thus, the authors wrote, ‘classification of the poor into the necessarily and voluntarily indigent became the central purpose of poverty relief, and the control of the labour market its primary function.’(1982, p 10)

When the authors focused on Britain in the mid-to-late 1970s, they identified numerous examples of a ‘welfare backlash’, played out in the media in the context of a period of recession, rising unemployment and central government funding cuts. At least one observer had previously defined such backlashes as examples of moral panic, a sudden and generalised demonising of certain people in response to the emergence of threats to social values or interests (Cohen, in Golding & Middleton, 1982, p 28).

Golding and Middleton disagreed with the moral panic theory, arguing instead that ‘at least in the context of poverty and welfare, the process is much more the recurrent refurbishing of a series of images and beliefs that have a historical continuity and that lie very shallowly below a veneer of apparent welfare consensus’ (1982, p 59).

As to the role of the news media in this recurrent process, the authors argued that journalists were providing news, not documenting social policy, and thus news values prevailed over social values in the shaping of media coverage of welfare. As a result, British media coverage of welfare stories emphasised ‘areas of contention or appeal, rather than socially significant matters’ (1982, p 69).

The authors studied British national media coverage of welfare stories published from July to December 1976. Their content analysis found that close to one third of these

stories dealt in some way with the issue of social security abuse. The analysis also identified several prevailing themes, including the notion that such abuse was widespread and that this was a matter of common knowledge. Additionally, the reporting included a theme of citizenship, reflecting ‘a battle of attrition against those who threaten the ethics and values of the hardworking, taxpaying majority’ (1982, p 83).

By inference, journalists may be considered as constituting a part of the hardworking – or at least working – majority; the output of journalists reflects their experience of the world and their occupational ideology does not take account of direct experience or contact with the world of poverty and welfare. Thus Golding and Middleton asserted that media coverage of social welfare, at least in Britain, was not informed by sceptical analysis, but again by conventional news values. In addition, the authors found that collective journalistic attitudes towards welfare and its recipients were informed by an absence of sympathy and a critical stance. Welfare stories were ‘seasoned with the drama, language and values of the entertainment media that the modern news service has become. The subject itself is perceived to be intrinsically boring [and there was] general hostility to social security and its claimants that journalists concede is the norm in British journalism’ (1982, p 152).

In relation to the Australia of the 1970s, Law identified some apparently generalised hostility held by government bureaucrats (and perhaps the media) towards at least some idle youth. Once again, a hostile stance was seen to be based on historical attitudes. In Law’s discussion (which adopts Foucault’s concept of governmentality as a set of techniques and technologies of discipline) Australian administrators of income support

constructed young Australians who surfed as “lazy subjects ...within the broader problem of idleness” that had faced liberal-democratic governments since the 19th century (2001, p 25). As to the actual identification of these lazy subjects, Law observed that:

It was almost unanimous who these ‘bludgers’ were. Physically, they were mainly young males who preferred not to get haircuts, wash frequently or wear appropriate clothes. Behaviourally, they surfed, tended to show disrespect for authority, were nomadic and deliberately failed job interviews by registering for ridiculous occupations and residing in places where little work could be offered by the CES [Commonwealth Employment Service]. These caricatures found constitution in newspapers across the country. (2001, p 33)

Law published his analysis in the same year that Fincher and Saunders edited and published a collection of contemporary commentaries and reviews of poverty, inequality and disadvantage in Australia. In a prologue, Fincher and Saunders noted the power of language to act both as a tool for achieving political and policy change, and as a means to convey the ‘moral messages of policy’ (2001, pp 26-27). As editors of the review, Fincher and Saunders also noted the relative dearth of research into uses of language in public discourses about poverty in Australia.

One exception, at least, occurred in the same review, which featured Putnis’ analysis of newspaper reporting of welfare issues in the three months preceding the federal election of October 1998. As Putnis saw it, this was a period characterised by the “general ascendancy ...of the ‘welfare dependency as a problem’ frame promoted by the [Howard] government.”(2001, p 78) Shaver later summarised this view as being part of a broad ideological consensus that the welfare system had ‘become a source of social ills, rather than part of the solution to them’ (2002, p 331).

Putnis identified anti-welfarism as either an overt feature of, or an implicit backdrop to, the vast majority of stories about welfare subjects in his case study sample. Further, he suggested that media commentary about problems in the welfare system had the effect of mainstreaming and legitimating certain concerns, such as the prevalence of dole cheats or single mothers. In turn, the process of identifying and acknowledging such concerns provided impetus for particular conceptual frameworks, so that the ‘idea that these attitudes are shared by a growing number of Australians thus takes root and becomes ‘common knowledge’. Once this has happened, not only the politicians but also the media themselves must take notice’ (2001, p 86).

Putnis scrutinised welfare reporting in two broadsheets – the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* – and two tabloids, the *Daily Telegraph* and *Herald Sun*. His analysis found that the tabloids had a far greater tendency than the broadsheets to promote anti-welfare themes, including by giving much more prominence to stories about alleged welfare fraud.

Putnis noted that a longstanding analysis of the media concerns its framing of issues in moral terms, with deviance and control featuring as prime news values. As Golding and Middleton expressed it, the media are seen as directors of a ‘continuous morality play’ (1981, p 238). For Putnis, this meant that reporting on welfare could have direct consequences for people on welfare because:

the work of the media directly impinges on the way the poor and the disadvantaged are treated by governments and their fellow citizens, and on how these groups see themselves....[further] in news and current affairs, audiences are often constructed as mass juries passing judgements on people and behaviours. In short, the media are powerful. (2001, pp 99-100)

Powerful both as a conduit between government and people, and people and government, but also in terms of influence on both government and people. As Putnis put it, the media is “not just in the transmission business, they are major players in the ‘meaning business’, generating community understandings which ultimately feed back into political priorities” (2001, pp 99-100).

In relation to this meaning business and unemployment, Eardley and Mathieson have suggested that:

Australians do seem to have had a notable propensity to attribute at least part of the responsibility for joblessness to people’s own unwillingness to work. A number of commentators have argued that the media and politicians have a major responsibility for encouraging these attitudes through publicity campaigns against so-called ‘dole bludgers’. (1999, p 30)

Eardley and Mathieson’s analysis focused on people’s attitudes about unemployment and the unemployed. Although they noted the effects of the media as a source of information and influence on opinion formation, they did not seek to scrutinise the specific work and products of the media in the context of journalistic depictions of the unemployed.

Scrutiny of the media’s role in the policy-making process has been undertaken in the United States, where Pieper used content analyses of newspaper and television reporting on welfare subjects to seek to explain a rapid shift in public opinion on welfare during the

1990s. This period was characterised by an intense political contest between Democrats and Republicans over welfare reform, ending in 1996 with President Clinton signing into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.

Pieper's research involved a focus on the nexus between what he called patterns of media treatment of welfare, the role of political elites, and changes in public attitudes towards welfare. His research detected a rapid increase in the number of welfare stories during 1993-96, coinciding with a sharp rise in anti-welfare sentiment as measured in opinion polling. Concurrently, the 'underlying dynamics of welfare had generally remained unchanged, however. No new welfare caseload crisis had emerged, nor was any legitimate fiscal danger looming' (2008, p 12). Thus changes in public opinion and in media coverage could not be attributed to systemic, demand or budgetary issues.

In Pieper's analysis, the media's subject framing – or presentation – of welfare was primarily in terms of political issues and (in line with Chomsky and Herman's manufacturing consent theory) the media relied primarily on official sources for their stories. According to Pieper, 'politicians and government officials on average were more likely than any group to be used as sources. Social scientists were cited infrequently in stories on welfare.' (2008, p 15)

Thus welfare reform in the US context was framed in media reporting as a political and legislative enterprise, rather than a set of social or economic problems, and largely

excluded other voices including those of welfare advocates and experts outside of political circles. As Pieper saw it:

The discursive tone of this meta-frame allowed political elites to advance highly negative and disparaging perspectives of welfare with relative impunity and little interference. The combination of media focus on political strategy and the widespread chorus of criticism of the system constitutes a highly plausible explanation for the sudden increase in anti-welfare public opinion. (2008, p 16)

As to the specific performance of the media in its contributions to the 1990s welfare reform debate in the US, Pieper argued that the results of his frame analysis showed that the media acted as a ‘silent partner’ or unwitting accomplice in the development of anti-welfare sentiment that, he asserted, was necessary for the passage of welfare reform:

In general, the media did not display journalistic independence in the sense of locating non-governmental sources, challenging official assertions, investigating polemical claims, or giving fair and equal treatment to all interested voices. The ‘watchdog’ function of the press in this instance was constrained to the point of virtual impotence. (2008, pp 17-18)

In Australia, a number of writers have addressed issues concerning the quality and prevalence of the journalistic practices that Pieper found to be starkly absent from US welfare reform reporting. Both Schultz (1992) and McIlwaine and Bowman (2002), for example, have argued that the notions of deeper inquiry and analysis present in investigative journalism could and should be applied to daily journalistic practices. In short, journalists should apply an analytical approach to any and all potential stories; they should ask more and better questions of a wider range of sources and, in particular, refrain from relying on official sources as the sole repository of authoritative interpretations of news.

There appears to be little research that has focused specifically on Australian media representations of unemployment and the unemployed, and more broadly on welfare discourses. The dole cruiser case study presented here therefore represents an attempt to consider the role of the news media in the ongoing social and political debates about people's lives and livelihoods, and about who pays and who is to blame for unemployment, poverty and social disadvantage.

2.2 Aims of the thesis

These are the aims of the thesis. First, to describe aspects of the material used by the government as a basis for its statement about quantification of a category of unemployed people defined by their attitudes. Second, to consider how the government presented that material to a sample of Australian newspapers and third, to describe and analyse how those media outlets presented the material to the public.

These goals will be considered against the Chomsky framework of the propaganda model and also against relevant aspects of the political context of the government statement.

In short then, the thesis aims to describe what a group of social researchers and government bureaucrats told the government about unemployed people, and what the government in turn told the media. The media's message about the dole cruisers is the primary subject of analysis, but as observed previously, a major research goal is to inform

that analysis by describing and discussing the process that produced the story of the dole cruisers.

The critical questions to be answered relate to the media's performance in relation to a number of interests. I have identified these as being those of the government, the community, and the unemployed people who were the subject of government, media and community attention. In other words, what was said about the dole cruisers, and whose interests were served?

Chapter 3

3.1 Introducing the dole cruisers

In May 2002, the Australian government made what appeared to be an unprecedented announcement about unemployment. For the first time, the government said, it had established how many people were wilfully refusing work in favour of a subsidised life on unemployment benefits. Previously, what had been known about such people had been based on common wisdom, or what the government characterised as anecdotal evidence. Now the government – through its Employment and Workplace Relations Minister – was asserting that ‘as many as’ one in six unemployed people were choosing the dole over their duty to seek and accept paid employment (Brough, 2002a). Three weeks before the Minister's announcement, the latest monthly labour force data showed that an estimated 622, 300 people were unemployed (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002, p 4).

The people identified by the Minister sounded just like dole bludgers and they were, the government said. Simultaneously, however, they were to be known by a new name – dole cruisers. This was part of a new nomenclature based on what was depicted as unprecedented research into the motives and attitudes of job seekers, including those who received social security benefits.

The dole cruiser, however, was not an entirely new creation but a figure with a substantial pedigree linked to the evolution of Australia's welfare system. The following sections of this chapter provide a brief overview of the development of that system, as well as detailing the work of historians who have documented recurrent anxieties about the propensity of welfare to weaken the work ethic.

3.2 'Self respect and manly independence'

In his history of the Australian welfare state, Kewley describes a prevailing pre-Federation belief about the corrosive effects of State poverty relief. Handouts 'undermined self-reliance and initiative (and) encouraged pauperism.' (1969, p 1) Not that the deserving poor were denied charity by the better-off – the colony of NSW saw its first welfare institution established in 1800 with the opening of the Female Orphan School. But while colonial authorities would subsidise charitable groups they were generally reluctant to assume direct responsibility for the care of destitute individuals. And even the non-government welfare sector had its limits. In the 1860s, some among the needy

could still be excluded. As Kewley noted, they were the mentally ill and the unemployed (1969, p 2).

By the 1890s times had changed and 19th century attitudes began to give way to new ideas and then their implementation in social welfare programs. First came legislation for old age pensions in New South Wales and Victoria in 1900. Proponents of the age pension argued that far from inducing thriftlessness, the innovation would produce hope among working people. The Victorians held a royal commission. It reported two years before the end of the century that ‘the idea is to afford equitable aid without weakening the individual initiative, or impairing the Anglo-Saxon characteristics of self respect and manly independence’ (1969, p 26). North of the border, some were even more concerned to defend the essential character of the man in the street. NSW Legislative Council member Sir Arthur Renwick told the House that recipients of the proposed pension ‘must be of good moral character (and) sober, reputable’. (1969, pp 38-9) In particular, citizens who had spent time in prison should be disqualified.

Then came Federation and a constitution that assigned power to the Commonwealth to make invalid and old age pensions. The new nation’s legislators moved, if not with lightning speed, and by 1909 had established a national age pension scheme. The national invalid pension followed in 1910 and by 1912, a universal maternity allowance in the form of a cash grant to each new mother. The pace of reform slowed after that but there was still room before the mid 1920s for the creation of a widows pension in NSW, a child

endowment scheme there as well, and an unemployment insurance scheme in Queensland.

3.3 'Loafers' paradise'

Despite the social pioneering of the early 20th century, suspicion lingered about the potentially malign effects of handouts for the jobless. Kewley reports that in 1923, Queensland's proposal for unemployment insurance was criticised in the local press as a "Loafers' Paradise Bill" (1969, p 65). At the onset of the Depression, there was still no national unemployment scheme. Molony argues that the mass unemployment that swept the nation "revealed the frailty of the Australian social laboratory"(1987, p 271). Perversely, perhaps, the Depression also revealed the robustness of an older idea. Moloney says some people 'denounced 'subsidised idleness' and predicted that, come prosperity, the evil would continue because there would be a generation reared on doing nothing which would want to remain in that state of alleged bliss.' (1987, p 271) The subsidised idleness prevailing during the Depression amounted to public works programs and 'susso' – sustenance payments or the dole, financed by the States.

3.4 ‘Casuals, strikers and alcoholics’

As the economy recovered and the Australian welfare state developed through the 1940s – driven in part, Kewley says, by a global clamour for social security – the problem of idleness receded as employment expanded. Law writes that unemployment rates hovered around one per cent in Australia from the end of World War II until the early 1970s, so ‘during this time, administrative problems involving application of the work test centred on the issue of how to deal with casuals, strikers and alcoholics.’ (2001, p 27)

People who sought unemployment benefits had to pass the work test. They did so by meeting an administrative definition of availability for work. In a post-war period of full employment, the administrators of the dole had only a few, easily understood categories of claimants to deal with. They were either workers between jobs or separated from them by industrial action, or they were chronically unable to work because of a self-inflicted malady like alcoholism.

These administrative categories, however, were on the verge of obsolescence. A host of changes – social, political, economic – were on the march and had been throughout the 1960s. Into the 70s, unemployment began to rise and new definitions of its causes were required. By the middle of the decade and after the oil shocks that sent world fuel prices dangerously high, a new jargon of structural unemployment entered the language in Australia and elsewhere. But if the previous 20 years had seen a flowering of new forms of individuality expressed in social and political relations, then that same individuality

could also be used as an explanation for unemployment. When it began to rise worldwide, as Law suggests, ‘the most obvious explanation by administrators (in Australia) was ‘laziness’ – which was particularly conspicuous and dangerous among youth’ (2001, p 27). Here again was the phenomenon apparent in the 1930s: declining employment produced a critical response towards those who lacked jobs. Idleness in others was a state to be feared because they might get used to it; laziness suggested a predisposition to that same state.

3.5 ‘Hippies’ and ‘Surfies’

In the 70s, there seemed to be little doubt inside the Commonwealth Department of Social Security about the nature of the group of people who wanted State support but not work. As Law demonstrated, the Department spelled out the terms of the problem and its response in a directive to staff in 1971. The work test: ‘the need to ensure that a claimant is genuinely looking for work [was to apply especially to] members of Hippie (sic) colonies...members of the ‘Surfie’ element” and people who might have moved to a new location for non-work reasons, like political protest or tourism’ (2001, p 29).

This directive meant that ‘young, single persons’ in the specified categories would usually be disqualified from the dole. They would not be able to bypass the work test and they would fail it.

Public servants who might have still been in doubt about appropriately identifying undeserving claimants could have found advice in contemporary accounts in the media. At departmental desks bureaucrats could read about ‘malingerers (who) tend to be under 25s who think work is for the birds’ in the *Adelaide Advertiser* (1972) or check the *Courier Mail* (1973) view of young jobless people as ‘drop-outs’ and ‘slovenly dressed’. (2001, p 32). Law suggests these descriptions were part of a media caricature that depicted the lazy unemployed as mainly young, male, unkempt, itinerant and insolent. And they liked to surf.

It would be some 30 years before the research that identified the dole cruisers also suggested evidence to challenge this particular stereotype about young dole-bludging men.

Chapter 4

4.1 The mutual obligation policy

After its election in March 1996, the first Howard government began to implement policies requiring the unemployed to increase their efforts to find work. Nine years earlier, the then Opposition had committed itself to a compulsory work for the dole scheme, arguing that this would be good for the unemployed and good for the community which would get at least some return on the taxpayer dollars invested in unemployment benefits (Brown, 1987, p 1876). The then Hawke Labor government attacked the

proposal as nothing more than an attempt to exploit community prejudices about unemployment (Howe, 1987, p 1876). By 1991, however, Labor was itself exerting more pressure on the jobless with a 'new emphasis on active job search' (Eardley and Matheson, 1999, p 1). The Keating Government in 1994 also implemented more changes in this direction. Thus when John Howard took power, he could build on an idea already embraced by his political opponents – that people who received the dole should be obliged to do more and more in return. The theoretical basis of the Howard approach involved the concept of mutual obligation. The idea – later expressed by the government's welfare agency (Centrelink, 2005) – was that the unemployed should 'give something back to the community which supports you. This means you are expected to look actively for work, accept suitable work offers and undertake extra activities to improve your chances of finding work.'

Thus were the unemployed provided with a dual mission in which they were to act as good job seekers while also seeking to become better job seekers and thus better candidates for employment. By implication, what the good job seeker could give back to the community would be an expression of gratitude, manifested by diligent effort. Thus the 'you' of the Centrelink proposition could simultaneously be unemployed and a hard worker.

4.2 Public opinion and unemployment

The Howard government argued that it had widespread public support for its policy stance on the unemployed.

However, Eardley and Matheson point out that up until 1999, there was little research done into public attitudes towards specific forms of work testing, such as the Work for the Dole scheme introduced by the government in 1997 (1999, p 26).

Morgan Gallup had conducted regular opinion polling of Australian attitudes on the causes of unemployment from 1975 until 1993. The results over that 18-year period showed that attitudes fluctuated, to some extent in line with changes in the economic cycle, but the proportion of respondents who blamed the unemployed for being unemployed never fell below about 20 per cent and peaked at times at near 50 per cent (1999, pp 5-9).

In their 1999 paper, Eardley and Matheson scrutinised an existing study on attitudes to unemployment and the unemployed. In 2002, Eardley and other colleagues followed up with their own survey. They found broad support for many of the principles of mutual obligation. However, the findings also suggested that people were more supportive of the imposition of some mutual obligation requirements on young unemployed people than on their older counterparts, the disabled or parents of young children. The researchers also considered the relationship between respondents' attitudes and their sources of

information. People were unlikely to be well informed about social security rules although many might know people who had been unemployed. Further, “much of the discourse around unemployment and ‘dole bludgers’ has been created or reinforced in media commentary and by some politicians”, so people could be ‘reflecting back what they have heard from such sources’ (2000, p 30). At the same time, however, the researchers reported that more than 50 per cent of respondents also believed that the Australian government was responsible for solving unemployment.

4.3 A ‘victims’ versus ‘duties’ debate

Critics of the Howard government’s mutual obligation policy such as Mendes argued that it represented an attack on the poor, led by conservative think tanks including the Institute of Public Affairs and the Centre for Independent Studies. Their aim, Mendes claimed, was ‘to reshape public opinion and public policies in favour of the free market agenda’ (1997, p 44). He argued that the theoretical approach of these think tanks was based on the doctrines of the 18th century thinker Adam Smith, the Austrian theorist Friedrich Hayek and US economist Milton Friedman. Mendes attributes to Hayek, for example, the view that there are negative results when governments intervene to promote abstractions like social justice or concrete acts like income redistribution – the end result is to encourage laziness or other unproductive behaviour. Mendes summed up the ideas of the think tanks and the policies of the government as ‘blaming the victim...’ (1997, p 41). Separately, and in the context of US media reporting about victims of political violence, Chomsky and Herman’s analysis suggested that such victims were represented

variously as ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’, and that the media’s coverage of the different victims differed sharply (1994, p39).

In contrast, the Centre for Independent Studies scholar, Samuel Gregg, argued that ‘mutual obligation is an idea whose time has come’. Gregg quoted Lord Acton’s observation in 1864, that “the moral foundation of political economy is not the satisfaction of appetite, but the fulfilment of duties.” This dictum, Gregg wrote, ‘goes to the heart of the contemporary debate about mutual obligation.’ The debate, he implied, was between those who preferred to emphasise people’s rights and those who argued for a balance to be struck between rights and obligations (Gregg, 2000, p 41).

4.4 ‘As effective as the stocks’

The debate between Mendes, Gregg and others was not entirely a new one. Concern about the increasing national cost of welfare and an associated censorious note could be detected in the Bulletin magazine when it profiled Fraser government Social Security minister Margaret Guilfoyle almost a quarter of a century earlier, describing her as ‘the new overlord of the burgeoning welfare service [who had] cracked down on dole bludgers...’ (24 Jan 1976, p 10). In the same year, 50 per cent of respondents to a Morgan Gallup opinion poll believed that unemployed people were to blame for unemployment. Nearly two decades on, a metropolitan weekly newspaper declared in an editorial that Australia was ‘the victim of a Welfare State mentality’ because people on the dole had taken holidays overseas. Such people, the paper told its readers, were

‘(F)reeloading at your expense’ (Sunday *Telegraph*, 7 Feb,1993, pp 1-2). This discovery of such flagrant disregard for taxpayers was not without precedent. As Golding and Middleton reported, British media reports in 1976 had claimed that the unemployed were spending their welfare benefits on holidays in Spain. Although never confirmed, these reports were ‘written firmly into popular history’ (1981, p 106).

Channel Nine’s A Current Affair exposed some individual ‘freeloaders’ in 1996, when it reported on the Paxtons. These sibling teenagers and their cousin, all from Melbourne, publicly rejected offers of employment on a Queensland resort island. It was the program itself that flew the Paxtons to the island. A newspaper columnist described them as ‘the patron saints of dole bludgers...’(Ackerman, 1996, pp 4-5). After his election victory, John Howard gave his first television interview as prime minister to A Current Affair, saying he understood the anger of ‘hardworking, battling Australian taxpayers’ towards the Paxton family (Miranda, 1996, p 2). Another newspaper columnist applauded the exposure of these malingerers, noting that ACA host Ray Martin had proved that television ‘can be as effective today as the stocks used to be in changing attitudes’(Farmer, 1996, p 3). Clearly, it was only the recipients of public humiliation who were required to undergo attitudinal change. The merits of the attitudes of the diligent masses – and those of their media and political representatives – were unimpeachably not in question.

In the year after the Howard Government’s election, Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* used its news pages in an attempt to show that work was there for the asking, despite evidence of

persistent high unemployment (Wockner, 1997, p 3). The paper reported that four young people were able to find work within hours of starting to look for it, at a time when nearly 810,000 Australians were registered as unemployed. The four young people were in fact *Telegraph* employees who were told to present themselves as long-term unemployed people. The paper noted that their successful search for jobs occurred on the same day that the Work for the Dole legislation was voted into law in the federal parliament. On the following day, a *Daily Telegraph* columnist wrote that her paper had received at least 40 telephone calls of complaint about the report. In defence of the *Telegraph's* approach, the columnist asserted the 'fact' that 'dead-end, poorly paid jobs are there to be had. They always have been and always will be' (Devine, 1997, p 10). The newspaper did not map the locus of 'there' in relation to those jobs that were allegedly available, albeit lacking reasonable remuneration and prospects.

4.5 'Rip', 'rort', 'grab'

The newspaper and television reports referred to in the previous section can be seen as part of a pattern of reporting on welfare and unemployment by the Australian news media. The pattern was present in coverage of Howard government campaigns to prevent or reduce welfare fraud and abuse. By way of example, the following headlines appeared in capital city daily newspapers late in 1996:

- Welfare rorts reach \$162m (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 19 Oct, 1996, p 1)
- Dole cheats up for \$84m (*Sunday Mail*, 24 Nov, 1996, p 27)
- Welfare cheats rip off \$1b (*Courier Mail*, 28 Nov, 1996, p 1)
- Welfare cheats rort \$5m in 3 months (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 19 Dec, 1996, p 3)

More of these headlines followed in the next year:

13,000 welfare cheats caught (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 27 Feb, 1997, p 1)

\$8m Tassie welfare rort (*Hobart Mercury*, 3 March, 1997, p 1)

Welfare purge nets \$264m (*The Australian*, 26 June, 1997, p 3)

Similar headlines appeared frequently in metropolitan newspapers from 1996 through to and beyond the period of the dole cruiser announcement of May 2002. For the purposes of this thesis, a search of ‘major Australian newspapers’ on the electronic database Nexus produced 546 articles featuring the search terms ‘welfare’ and ‘cheat’ published between January 1996 and March 2003. A separate search on ‘dole’ and ‘bludger’ between January 1996 and April 2003 produced 884 articles. This volume of reporting over a period of more than six years suggested a continuous effort by the government to publicise its actions to control welfare abuse and fraud, in tandem with the campaign to have the unemployed do more to find work. And, given the continuous association between cheats and rorters and many millions of public dollars, the headlines also suggested that the welfare system was being defrauded on a massive, widespread and chronic scale. Among many commentators, van Dijk (1988, p 43) has noted the critical role of the headline in expressing the main topic of a news story and, further, that news stories typically have an instalment character. For the purpose of consideration of the welfare reporting of the first six years of the Howard government, these multiple stories about welfare fraud could be considered as instalments themselves in a single overarching story told in collaborative fashion by the government and the news media. According to this story, the cheats and rorters were getting away with millions but the government was on to them. As with so many stories involving the interests of

governments and taxpayers or consumers, the dole fraud story featured a double bottom line, involving both moral judgements and deliberations about dollars.

After its election, the Howard Government reported regularly to parliament on what it called compliance – that is, the extent of its efforts, usually measured in dollar terms, to ensure welfare recipients complied with their obligations. Some 11 months after winning office, the government said its efforts were saving taxpayers more than \$10 million every week. The figure was based on compliance activity over the second half of 1996 (Newman, 13 Feb, 1997, pp 700-1). Eight months later, the figure rose to \$27.8 million in weekly savings. This time, the number was based on the full 1996 - 1997 financial year (Newman, 29 Oct, 1997, p 8351). By April 1998, the government was claiming savings of \$13 million a week, all of it paid back, the government said, by welfare recipients who were not entitled to the money. The April figure came from the first half of the 1997-98 financial year (Newman, 4 Mar, 1998, pp 2161-2). Three months later, the government said its compliance activities had saved taxpayers \$46.4 million a week, ‘since the Howard government began cracking down’ (Department of Social Security, 15 Jul, 1998). As noted earlier, the government had also introduced and publicised related moves to exert more administrative control over the activities of recipients of unemployment payments. These included a requirement for jobless people to record their efforts to find work in so-called dole diaries. This innovation had been announced early in the life of the new government, with the Social Security minister saying that the requirement would address ‘community concerns that ...a small minority of unemployed

people are not genuine about efforts to seek work and are still getting income support' (Department of Social Security, 15 Jul, 1996).

In other statements to parliament, the minister, Jocelyn Newman, justified the government's approach by arguing that cracking down on the (relatively) few cheats would prevent the stigmatisation of all social security recipients.

Such an approach positioned the government as the defender not just of the community at large, but also a notional majority of the unemployed. The government was the metaphorical shepherd, setting the administrative equivalent of sheepdogs onto the entire flock in order to identify and cull those black sheep lurking within who had been identified – by politicians and headline writers – as cheats, rorters and bludgers. The undeserving had to be singled out and separated from the more numerous deserving. The Government presented this purpose as legitimate because it was what the people wanted and it addressed community concerns.

4.6 A 'dishonoured system'

Golding and Middleton's work in Britain suggests that a political emphasis on controlling social security will be replicated by journalists, and this 'notion of social security as a policing mechanism creates the complementary image of the claimant as criminal' (1982, p 97). The effect is said to be the dissolution of the line between economic problems and what the British researchers described as 'moral inadequacy' (1982, p 97). In Canberra,

Minister Newman appeared to imply that victims of economic problems could be distinguished from those who might be victims of their own vices when she told the Parliament ‘(W)e will not fund the greedy when it ruins the reputations of the needy’ (Hansard, 25 Jun, 1997, p 5118). The greedy, it seemed, would be isolated in a moral holding pen while the needy, as their name implied, were put to pasture as deserving recipients of the dole. However, the linguistic isolating of the greedy few was not accompanied by specific administrative action. The dole diary, for example, was not meant solely for those already identified in some way as malingerers; it was to be applied more generally to people on unemployment benefits. And in other comments, Newman indicated that the stigma she was keen to contain was simultaneously capable of staining the entire social security system:

As long as there are any people who are not declaring their earnings or who are claiming entitlement to pensions for which they are not entitled, the social security system will be a dishonoured system. I do not believe that this nation deserves a dishonoured system. The people who get the benefits should be believed to be honest and credible. (Hansard, 3 Dec, 1996, p 6538)

Therefore, national virtue was at stake and a strategy of promoting punishment of the few in order to preserve the good name of the majority had to involve measures that applied to all the unemployed. All would have to fill out a dole diary to demonstrate their honesty, even if only a small minority were suspect. And even if the government argued that it believed most jobless people to be honest, the stream of newspaper headlines reflected a different reality, one clearly influenced by the government. The reality was one of welfare cheats who would rot, rip off and grab. The official response was predicated on another word used by the headline writers, the verb to purge. The cheating

unemployed would give their law-abiding counterparts a bad name, unless they were identified and the social security system appropriately cleansed. The necessary strong medicine would be prescribed to every unemployed person and thus each could be a candidate for the stigmatising the government claimed to be so keen to cure.

Newspaper headline writers and reporters were, in part, helping to write the prescription for the cure. As Putnis has asserted, the development of anti-welfarism during the initial years of the Howard government depended to some extent on the amplification of certain ideas via news reporting and commentary (2000, p 78). Among these ideas was the notion that hard working low-income earners were falling behind, while welfare recipients increasingly enjoyed a free ride at taxpayer expense. Putnis argued that although such ideas were not an invention of the media they were, in effect nourished by the reporting. A social and political dichotomy emerged in which personal pronouns stood for divisions between those who gave and those who took; both commentators and letter writers referred to 'our welfare state', thereby mainstreaming and legitimating notions about welfare recipients as both a cause and subject of mass community hostility.

The anti-welfarism described by Putnis also provides some of the context for the dole cruiser story in line with van Dijk's theoretical approach. This approach emphasises the interdependence of a text (such as a newspaper report) and the context in which the story comes into existence. A fuller description and analysis of the text requires similar consideration of its context. As van Dijk puts it, 'vast amounts of social and political knowledge and beliefs are presupposed by the journalist' (1988, p 62). In other words,

any news report will contain implicit presuppositions that readers will be expected to recognise or understand. Presuppositions, in the case of this welfare discourse, including concepts about the existence and prevalence of ‘bludging’ welfare recipients, and also about the role of government in disciplining those recipients in the interests of social security administration and the community itself.

Thus the socio-political and cultural contexts of the story of the dole cruisers includes some six years of media reporting of Howard government political rhetoric and policy implementation concerning the operations of the welfare system and the behaviour of its beneficiaries, including those on the dole.

The following chapter outlines the development of other, specific aspects of the development of the dole cruiser context, including its origins in New Zealand.

Chapter 5

5.1 The New Zealand model

What I have presented as the government’s continuous campaign to control the unemployed took a new direction in 2000, when it commissioned a research company to investigate the attitudes of unemployed people. The company – Colmar Brunton – originated in New Zealand and had done similar research there in 1995.

When I accessed its website in 2004, Colmar Brunton promoted its use of social marketing, with a special pitch aimed at governments:

Social marketing is an exciting and fresh approach to bringing about behaviour change using concepts and techniques developed in the commercial sector. Colmar Brunton's approach to social marketing is specifically tailored to the needs of public sector organizations in Australasia.

The core principle of social marketing is that initiatives must aim not only to inform or educate but also to affect behaviour. Research is therefore generally required to provide a clear understanding of, and ways to change, any current behaviour which may lead to undesirable outcomes.

The Theory

The literature suggests that people do not undertake instantaneous behaviour change; they work their way up to it gradually, often going through clearly definable stages (Maibach and Cotton 1995). A useful model of behaviour change stages has been developed by Prochaskau and DiClemente (1986) who suggest that people move through five stages as they go from ignorance or indifference, towards some important behaviour, and to becoming committed to it. (Colmar Brunton, 2004)

It was in Colmar Brunton's home country that the company first applied these behaviour change concepts to the subject of unemployment. New Zealand's national employment service commissioned the company to examine levels of job search activity by unemployed people, together with an assessment of their self-reported levels of confidence about finding work. At the time of the research, the employment service's marketing manager was Jude Ulrich. In an interview for the radio documentary associated with this thesis, she reported that about half of the research population were 'quite confident' about seeking work and nearly half were actively seeking work. The researchers also found fewer than expected numbers of people who could be classified as happily unemployed:

We found that contrary to popular myth, only about six per cent of people are actually enjoying the unemployed lifestyle, they're cruising. So they're not actively seeking work and they're kind of ambivalent, they're sort of not over-confident, they don't lack confidence, they're just happy where they are. There's only six per cent. (Robinson, 2005)

The NZ researchers also identified five other sub groups or segments of job seekers.

These groups were labelled as:

- Drivers
- Searchers
- Struggling job seekers
- Explorers
- Withdrawn job seekers

Jude Ulrich told me that withdrawn job seekers represented 25 per cent of the research population. These people reportedly had given up hope of ever finding paid employment and therefore required specific policy responses:

They weren't in that category because of a lack of willingness, they were suffering. And so you can imagine, you don't take to that group with a stick and force them to be confident, you have to develop strategies to bring them up and to encourage that job-seeking activity. They're quite a different group from your cruisers. (Robinson, 2005)

New Zealand authorities used Colmar Brunton's research to inform a publicity campaign designed to motivate the unemployed. After that, however, the government abandoned this sort of market research as a tool of unemployment policy. There was no systematic attempt to change the behaviour of any of the unemployed.

In 1999, Colmar Brunton established an office in Canberra. By the end of the following year, the company was working for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). The project was modelled both on Colmar Brunton's use of social

marketing principles and on its previous government-commissioned scrutiny of unemployed people in New Zealand.

In order to further inform my analysis of the dole cruiser story as supplied by the government to the news media, I asked DEWR for information about what became known as the Australian model of attitudinal segmentation of the unemployed. This request proved to be the initial step in a protracted process, as outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

6.1 Freedom of information

From late 2002 to mid 2004, this writer used federal freedom of information laws to seek material about the dole cruisers from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. The initial application sought copies of any documents used by the department in the preparation of the Minister's dole cruiser media release. The request was based on the argument that releasing any such information would be in the public interest.

In an initial response, the department's principal government lawyer outlined his reasons for releasing some documents but withholding others. Here's part of the letter:

In respect of File WR02/15426 titled 'Labour Market Development – Research – Job Seeker Attitudinal Segmentation – Reporting' which contains 55 folios that fall within the scope of your request I have decided to exempt in full 30 folios numbered

54-56 and 58-84 under the provisions of sections 36 (1) of the Act. However whilst this includes a draft departmental quantitative research report titled 'Job Seeker Attitudinal Segmentation – Analysis of the Segments' I have identified that the report is now in a final format. Consequently I have decided to release the document to you in its final format; and to release in full to you the report 'Job Seeker Attitudinal Segmentation – an Australian Model' (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2003, pers comm.1 Sept).

What the department's lawyer was proposing to provide were two reports that were already on the department's website and publicly available. What the lawyer would not release were two departmental briefings to the Minister.

Elsewhere in the letter, he gave his reasons for keeping the briefings secret. The reasoning relied on a definition of the documents under section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act, along with an interpretation of public interest. The documents were described as including opinions or recommendations, as well as material that might mislead or misinform a reader because it was in a nascent and not final form. There were, the lawyer acknowledged, public interest factors in favour of disclosure, including a general public interest in people having access to documents that concern them. Disclosure could also 'allow closer scrutiny of governmental decisions affecting members of the public' (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2003, pers comm, 1 Sept).

In the case of the dole cruisers, the government had indeed made decisions affecting members of the public. As will be seen in a forthcoming chapter, Minister Brough promised in May 2002 to 'disrupt the lifestyle' of cruising dole recipients. Less than a week before that statement, the Howard government had announced in a new Budget that it would extend the reach of its mutual obligation requirements. From 1 July 2002, the

Work for the Dole program was extended to cover people aged up to 49. Despite these changes, Mr Brough's officials thought that releasing the briefings would be contrary to the public interest. Why? Because the briefings contained views that had been expressed on the basis of continuing confidentiality between DEWR officials and their Minister. As the lawyer put it: 'Release of such material would involve a breach of the necessary confidential relationships between Ministers and departmental officers and may in future hamper the provision of candid expressions of views and opinions' (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2003, pers comm, 1 Sept).

The lawyer also wrote that he believed that matters of public interest were better served by allowing what he called the free flow of information, advice and opinion between the department and Ministers. Furthermore: 'the disclosure of recommendations, advice, views and opinions of an interim nature, could confuse readers as to the actual decisions made and the reasons for those decisions' (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2003, pers comm, 1 Sept).

I asked DEWR to reconsider its decision under Section 54 of the FOI Act. This entitles applicants to ask an agency to internally review a decision to withhold material.

Another senior government lawyer conducted the review and reported the results in correspondence early in 2004. This lawyer overturned some of the arguments of his colleague, finding that parts of the documents sent to the Minister could be released. Where section 36 once applied, it now did not. But in other cases, he wrote, parts of the

briefings to the Minister were still exempt under section 36 or under another section relating to personal privacy. Section 41(1) makes a document exempt if releasing it involves the unreasonable disclosure of personal information about any person, living or dead. Thus the second lawyer found a new reason to withhold information.

However, he also found a way to release all the exempted pages. The method was the censor's pen. A total of six pages could be released with appropriate deletions so that they would no longer be exempt documents.

What was released was a collection of briefing notes produced by DEWR's Labour Market Policy Group for the Minister. The documents arrived with blank white sections like snow over footprints. Whole sentences and paragraphs had been removed, along with at least one dot point under the heading 'Recommendation'. On another page, again written for the Minister's eyes, officials had deleted part of a section under the heading 'Implications'. One of three paragraphs, defined as 'Issues', was gone. So was the name of a member of the minister's staff who had sought: "Dot points requested by [censored] in your Office, as background for a possible 'op ed' article or speech material (see Attachment A)."

But what was written for the Minister's eyes must also have contained notes written in the Minister's hand, or the hand of someone in his office. Some of the pages given to me clearly had no deletions of the original text. Given that the privacy provisions of the FOI Act had been invoked to delete some material, it can be assumed that what was censored

on these pages were handwritten notes or comments. It can further be assumed that DEWR'S lawyers believed that a reader would be able to infer the identity of the author of these additions. Certainly, the text of the ministerial briefings as released to me included some handwritten marks, including underlined sections, indicating that at least some Ministerial staff, if not the Minister himself, had seen and annotated the documents. Copies of the documents are included in the appendix to this thesis.

The Australian Law Reform Commission and the Administrative Review Council (1996) have previously recommended changes to section 41 of the Act. In a review, the two bodies argued that there should be no presumption that personal information is exempt. They noted that a public interest test was implicit in the notion of unreasonable disclosure of personal information as defined in the Act. Sometimes, they said, the public interest in disclosure could outweigh an individual's interest in privacy. Thus '(T)o reflect this, an agency should be required to consider whether disclosure would be in the public interest'.

It is a matter for speculation as to what aspects of the personal privacy of the Minister, or officials, might have been protected by his department. If DEWR had been required to apply a public interest test against its own interpretation of its minister's personal privacy, would the outcome have been different? At the least, a new section 41 in line with the ALRC recommendations would have increased the prospects of receiving some uncensored documents.

Having received the censored version, there were two options available under the FOI legislation to continue the pursuit of the briefings in their complete, original form. An application for review could be lodged with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or with the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Instead, I opted to send a new FOI application to the department, seeking copies of all internal departmental correspondence generated by the previous application.

This time, a third government lawyer handled the matter and this time, copies of all the relevant documents were released but again, they came with deletions. As before, parts of the documents were deemed to be exempt from release under sections 36 and 41. Two other sections were now invoked for the first time. Section 42 involved documents covered by legal professional privilege; section 43 concerned business and commercial affairs.

A total of 11 folios (pages) were released with a variety of deletions. The documents included an exchange of e-mails between a DEWR official and a DEWR lawyer on 15 and 23 December 2003. The lawyer was the legal officer who reviewed the department's original rejection of my application for copies of the dole cruiser documents. On 15 December he sent a request to the official: 'Can you identify any particular sensitivities involved in disclosing folios 54-56 in file WR02/5343 and Folios 58-84 on (the same) file. If so, please tell me what they are and the reasons for them.'

The official e-mailed a response that said in part: ‘Folios 58-84 on file WR02/5343 contains opinions and advice of a sensitive nature about the attitudes of job seekers and how this might be used [censored] While 54-56 in the same file is related, the brief relates to areas of research that appear on the Department’s internet sight [sic] and so may be considered suitable for release.’

In the copy of the e-mail provided under FOI, a blank space had opened between the words ‘used’ and ‘While’. Here, the government did not want outsiders – the public – to know anything, even in barest form, about the potential application of DEWR’S ideas about the problematic unemployed.

Also included in the 11 censored pages was one with what appeared to be references to proposed courses of action relating to the dole cruisers. Folio 22, for example, featured five handwritten words on the top line of a page from a ruled A4 pad: ‘decrease satisfaction with current lifestyle’. As will be seen in a later chapter, the notion of an attack on lifestyle was central to the government’s public threats against the dole cruisers. Variations of this five-word phrase were uttered by the Minister for Employment and quoted by journalists; it is likely that for this reason, his department saw that it would have no legal basis for removing the words from the document released to me.

However, the rest of the page was blank. Whatever was written there had been deleted under sections 36(1) and 42. These are respectively the provisions relating to advice from the officials to their minister, and legal professional privilege.

Another ruled page, released without any deletion, contained more handwritten notes indicating attempts to anticipate future developments in the course of the pursuit of the original documents: ‘- said AAT hearing is a hearing de novo so if goes to AAT then client area will be likely called to give evidence’.

A hearing de novo is a fresh look at all the issues. It’s possible to infer that these handwritten notes were made during a meeting between DEWR officials and their lawyers to discuss strategy in the event of the applicant taking the matter to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Again, I opted to seek another internal review in the hope that this time, it would generate uncensored documents.

The results of that review were similar to those of its predecessor. Also, notably, the administrative line of DEWR lawyers curved into a circle and closed, for the lawyer who had ruled on the original application was now the one who handled the new internal review.

Again, the status of some documents was changed on review. Five pages that had been released with deletions the first time round were now available in full. Again, one lawyer overruled his colleague’s previous decisions. This time, the reviewer restored what had

been deleted under sections 41(1) – affecting personal privacy – and 43(1)c – relating to business affairs.

The business affairs were those of the department itself, because some of the documents now given to me in full were simply copies of internal receipts for FOI charges paid in the course of the application. What were released the second time round were a couple of numbers from the department's internal accounting system. The internal review also restored the names of DEWR officials that had been deleted from documents previously supplied to me. Neither the names nor numbers ever had any relevance to the cruiser research. In essence, the results of the review were insignificant. All the exemptions and deletions that concealed the department's thinking on attitudinal segmentation of the unemployed remained in force.

Nonetheless, this protracted FOI process did bear some fruit. Broadly, it revealed a defensive mindset on the part of the department in relation to my attempts to learn more about the dole cruiser research. In particular, the FOI inquiries indicated that the department believed that the very subject of job seekers' attitudes was, or could be, 'sensitive'. As noted above, this was demonstrated by internal DEWR e-mail references to 'opinions and advice of a sensitive nature' and the censoring of documented information about the potential application of this advice. The nature of the sensitivity that the department was protecting is a matter for speculation. Matters may be sensitive because disclosure can cause embarrassment or because there is potential to attract criticism. It is not clear whether DEWR's motives for censorship were based on a routine

response designed to protect its Minister's political interests, or those of the department, or whether it had specific concerns about avoiding scrutiny and criticism of the research itself.

As noted above, the main products of the FOI applications were the briefing notes in which the department provided information and advice to the Minister about the findings of the research into the attitudes of job seekers. Despite the censored nature of these documents, there was still a great deal within them that revealed the department's thinking about the relevance of the attitudinal research to the government's unemployment policy and how the findings might be used in the context of existing and new plans to discipline the unemployed. In particular, the briefings suggested that the department was more concerned with providing fresh material to support existing policy rather than establishing whether there were valid and significant causal links between the attitudes of job seekers and their success in pursuing employment.

The briefing notes are a significant element of the dole cruiser story. Analysis of these documents is outlined in the following chapter. In particular, it will be noted that the department effectively told its minister that he should direct more pressure against 'low commitment' job seekers, regardless of whether the evidence linking their attitudes to their workforce status would justify this.

Chapter 7

7.1 Attitudes ‘can have a major impact’

As reported previously, the Howard Government’s sixth Budget was delivered in May 2002. It included a number of welfare reform initiatives. Among these were plans to provide more assistance for job seekers and support for the long-term unemployed. In particular, the Government said it would: ‘provide 8,500 additional Work-for-the-Dole places each year to give job seekers greater opportunity to participate’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002). Given the compulsory nature of the Work For the Dole program, the Budget’s language about opportunity appeared somewhat euphemistic.

Six weeks before the Budget’s release, DEWR’s Labour Market and Policy Group (LMPG) provided the first of two consecutive briefings to the Minister about the work it had commissioned in relation to the attitudes of job-seeking Australians. The second briefing arrived in the Minister’s office in mid-May 2002, two days after the Budget. As noted previously, censored versions of the two documents were provided to me through the FOI process.

Taken together, the briefings expressed one overarching idea – that policy makers were entitled to use the suboptimal attitudes of certain job seekers to justify a harder line against job seekers generally, irrespective of the quality or nature of evidence provided by the research concerning those same attitudes. Although the research described in the two briefings was reported to be incomplete and the findings as provisional, the

documents' authors appeared to be confident that the work of attitudinal segmentation could be used to support the Government's plans to require still greater job search efforts on the part of the unemployed.

The first briefing – date stamped by the Minister's office as being received there on 26 March 2002 – provided a rationale for the research, outlined the department's expectations about its future benefits, and described the research methodology and findings. A copy of the briefing is attached in appendix A.

The briefing described its purpose as reporting to the Minister on the research effort to develop 'an Australian model of attitudinal segmentation of job seekers'. A notion of pre-existing validity was implicit here, because the research goal was not to bring something entirely new into being but to create a local version of an imported concept.

By way of establishing a relevant rationale, the document's authors put forward a statement that incorporated an hypothesis founded on a claimed mass consensus: 'It is widely recognised that job seekers' attitudes to job search can have a major impact on their success in finding work'.

By their nature, democratic governments are sensitive to mass opinion, in part because it may influence or reflect government legitimacy and also because it provides a context in which governments make, implement and communicate policy. Whether governments adopt popular or unpopular policies, they take account of public opinion. The notion of

wide recognition of a truth carries with it what van Dijk's theoretical model describes as the element of presupposition (1988, p 62). This element represents propositions that are implied or presupposed but not directly expressed through information in a text. The implicit presuppositions in the briefing's assertion about wide recognition of a truth about unemployment include that a mass consensus has power and authority and, in this case, this authority elevates the idea that job seekers' attitudes can be very significant. If most people accept the veracity of the idea, it will carry more weight – more truth – and thus provide further justification for the research course undertaken by the department on its Minister's behalf.

However, what DEWR was asserting was no more than a possibility – a notion that something could be so; furthermore, this was a notion proposed in the absence of any context and thus expressed as a generalisation, unqualified by potentially relevant factors like relative rates of unemployment and economic growth, government policies or local variables in labour markets. Indeed, the absence of supporting evidence for the concept was explicitly acknowledged, the document observing that 'despite' what most people would recognise as truth, there had been 'relatively little' previous formal research that examined the effect of people's attitudes on their attempts to find work.

So that which was widely recognised as potentially true was a concept without an empirical basis. There was a gap in the research and the department had identified a methodology to fill it. As the briefing noted, this would involve research to 'identify, describe and explain the conceptual model and quantification of the job seeker segments'.

(A conceptual model is a scheme or set of arrangements that attempts to provide a simplified view of a complex reality.)

In effect, the initial tasks of the research being reported to the Minister in late March 2002 were the creation of the model and the ‘quantification’ of its population – that is, determining how many job seekers fitted into the model. The initial, implicit message of the briefing was that the initial research would not attempt to determine whether attitudes held by job seekers had any effects – let alone a ‘major impact’ – on their success in finding work. Indeed the briefing note also informed the Minister that the research was a ‘work in progress’ and that future research would aim to find out ‘how attitudes impact on success in the labour market’.

Having outlined the rationale for the initial research, the briefing then provided further justification in the form of predictions about its worth. In summary, the departmental authors said they expected the research to make a valuable contribution to the efforts of Government and Job Network providers to understand and service their clients – the unemployed. Further, the authors predicted that the research over time would help to inform evaluation of the government’s programs and its employment policy. (The Howard government established the Job Network in 1998. This was a government-funded scheme involving delivery of employment services by contracted private and community sector bodies.)

Next, the briefing turned to the findings of the research. It reported that data on job seeker attitudes had been collected in a survey using a series of statements developed by the consultant, Colmar Brunton.

The briefing listed and described the eight ‘job seeker segments’ identified by the research. In addition, the briefing highlighted the two biggest segments, these being the highly motivated ‘Drivers’ and their polar opposites, the Cruisers. In relation to the latter, the briefing provided the Minister with an explicit expression of opinion:

The size of the *Cruiser* segment is of concern, as is the number of job seekers who appear to have given up hope of ever working again (*Disempowered and Withdrawn*). One of the aims of the research is to assist the identification and development of policy and communication strategies which can help to translate such job seekers into other segments to strengthen their prospects of employment.

In its expression of concern, DEWR’s Labor Market Policy Group clearly indicated that the dole cruisers were not the only group of unemployed who should be subject to attempts to help them find work. Notably, such future attempts are outlined within the terms of the ‘conceptual model’ referred to above. And even within this internal document, written for the Minister’s eyes, the DEWR writers adopt and therefore promote the social marketing lexicon that underpins the research that the department commissioned and funded. The aim is not to improve people’s chances of finding work but to shift them from one identified segment to other, more desirable segments. The purpose of such lexical choice, arguably, is to seek to represent the model as more real or tangible and therefore more valid.

Under the heading 'Future Directions' the briefing document reported that work was underway to complete an analysis of issues including the 'nature of the population' of each job seeker segment. In addition, the briefing also foreshadowed further research to determine whether job seekers actually did move between the segments, and also 'how attitudes impact on success in the labour market.'

The briefing concluded with a recommendation that the Minister note the information.

7.2 'Attitudes clearly matter'

On 16 May 2002 – two days after the delivery of the Federal Budget – the second of the two briefings was date stamped as having been received in 'Minister Brough's Office'. The briefing identified its subject as 'Draft Attitudinal Segmentation Report'. A copy of the document is attached at Appendix B.

Under an initial sub-heading – 'Purpose' – a DEWR censor had deleted what appeared to be more than two lines of typescript from the original document as seen by the Minister. The censor, apparently, wished to keep secret at least some aspect of DEWR's intentions or goals or rationale regarding the research. Following this blank space in the document, the initial uncensored words noted that 'this report examines the nature of the population in each of the attitudinal segments and explores the extent to which various segments use the facilities provided in Centrelink offices. The report is currently being finalised and detailed briefing will be prepared for you over the next week.'

Under a second subheading – ‘Background’ –the department advised that it had previously given the Minister information in the first briefing, and that this had in part informed consideration in the ministerial office about a media strategy. As noted previously, this advice included ‘dot points requested by [censored] in your Office, as background for a possible ‘op ed’ article or speech material. (see Attachment A)’.

The document Attachment A was headed ‘Job Seeker Attitudes and Employment Servicing’. Information in the document was organised under at least five sub headings. These were ‘Context’, ‘Research’, ‘The Attitude Segmentation Model’, ‘Implications’ and ‘Job Matching ‘Stepping Stones’ Research’.

The information in the attachment was organised against a number of bullet points. Under the ‘Context’ heading the first point noted that there was wide recognition of the fact that job seeker attitudes can have a ‘significant’ impact on success in finding work. This statement would have been identical to one of the opening statements in the first briefing provided to the Minister – save for the substitution of ‘major’ for ‘significant’ in the document received in the Minister’s office on 26 March 2002.

Under the second attachment heading – ‘Research’ – the document reported that:

The main objective of the Department’s *job seeker attitudinal segmentation* research was to develop a model based on attitudes to unemployment and job search. It is based on the concept of social marketing and on behaviour change models – social marketing is used to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences in order to benefit the target audience and/or the society as a whole. The attitudinal research provides a framework by

which to describe and characterise job seekers and is additional to those based on demographic characteristics. It becomes another tool in the service provision and evaluation tool kits with which to better identify services most appropriate to the individual.

The document also reported that eight job seeker segments had been ‘identified based on a survey of some 3000 jobseekers in 2001’.

Under the fourth heading – ‘Implications’ – the document featured four bullet points. The first of these described how ‘the characteristics associated with each of the segments’ could be used to ‘generate the desired behaviours’. The second and fourth bullet points respectively described the 16 per cent of highly motivated job seekers and the fact that ‘(A)lmost half of job seekers (48%) were identified as being in the more limited segments’.

The text associated with the third bullet point had been censored.

The briefing then turned to the ‘Issues’, noting that the research ‘has importance’ because it provided information about the ‘heterogeneous attitude segments’ and the ‘most effective forms of service intervention’. Further:

The findings provide information on the incidence of low commitment job seekers and therefore supports the relevance of greater activation (including through Mutual Obligation and Work for the Dole) and work first approaches. Attitudes clearly matter; job seekers are not a homogenous group; and providers need to tailor their interventions – especially to address those job seekers who are too selective or lowly motivated, or who have so adapted to unemployment that they show minimal commitment to searching for sustained employment.

In the minds of the department's officials, the attitudes of job seekers – or at least some of them – were relevant and significant in relation to the quest for employment, even if there was still no evidence of how attitudes actually influenced success or failure in the labour market. Indeed, the implication underlying the reports to the Minister was that in one crucial respect, the evidence did not matter. A belief that attitudes mattered – coupled with information about the 'incidence of low commitment job seekers' – was sufficient as a basis for Government action against this particular group of unemployed people.

As with the previous briefing, the department emphasised the expected merits of the research as providing 'a very valuable underpinning' for the Government's labour market interventions and promotion of better practice in the Job Network.

The briefing concluded with a recommendation that the Minister would receive a detailed analysis of the 'quantitative Attitudinal Segmentation report, once it is finalised, and [censored].'

The document was marked as noted and initialled by what appeared to me to be the Minister's own hand.

Provision of these two briefings to the Minister over a six-week period in the first half of 2002 represented a significant step in the process that began, as outlined previously, with the work done by Colmar Brunton in New Zealand in the 1990s. Up until mid-May 2002, the research commissioned by DEWR and undertaken by the company had been

unreported. However, as indicated in the second briefing, the Minister's office had given at least some consideration to disclosing the research by means including a speech or an 'op ed' article – that is, presumably, a speech by the Minister or a newspaper opinion piece bearing his name.

Thus the briefings, taken together, carried a dual purpose; first, to inform the Minister of the provisional research findings, their purported value and their policy implications, and second, to provide information to be used by the Minister's office when it considered what might be said publicly about the research and its future uses.

In terms of the propaganda model proposed by Chomsky and Herman, the combination of the research findings and the department's advice to the Minister represented a new contribution to the development of 'the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus' (1988, p 302). In this context, DEWR and its Minister, and also Colmar Brunton, may be considered as participating in an implicit elite consensus that positioned some unemployed people as the source of a problem to be solved. In particular, the briefings could be read as part of a continuing government discourse on unemployment that emphasised that the problem was not unemployment per se, but the behaviour of unemployed people. In effect, the burden of responsibility for unemployment was being borne by the unemployed themselves. As detailed in previous chapters, this definition of the problem was promoted by continuous collaborations between government and media that produced a serial set of reports about welfare fraud and dole bludgers, together with reports about government policy to cure these.

Arising from that same elite consensus, the Minister's media release would also constitute what could be interpreted as another government attempt to maintain the form of a mass consensus about dole bludgers, unemployment generally, and the identity of those responsible for solving the problem. Such an interpretation would, of course, reflect Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model notion of media reporting being a product of the manufacturing of consent. That is, that a 'purpose of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state' (1988, p 298).

In terms of the problem of unemployment and the attitudinal research, unemployed people would have to provide the solution by changing their own problematic behaviour; the government would provide the impetus for this to occur. In this context, it is notable that the attachment to the second briefing – as analysed previously – included a reference to the use of social marketing to 'influence the voluntary behaviour' of people. Such notions of choice proved not to be part of the Minister's agenda and, despite the department's advice about the forthcoming provision of another detailed briefing in coming days, the Minister did not wait. Three days after his office received the second briefing, Brough's media release about the dole cruisers was on its way into the public domain.

As noted previously, the departmental briefings had identified concerns about three of the eight categories of job seekers described in the research. Further, the advice to Brough

noted that 48 per cent of the surveyed job seekers were identified as being in the more limited segments. The Minister, however, focussed his attention solely on one specific group.

The next chapter will consider the content of the media release and its position within the welfare discourse on unemployment.

Chapter 8

8.1 ‘Attack...purge...blitz’

As noted above, Minister Brough received the second of his department’s two briefings on 16 May 2002. Four days later, the Minister issued a media release that focused on a single aspect of the research findings into attitudinal segmentation of job seekers. The text of this document is attached at Appendix C.

Although, as also noted previously, his department’s Labour Market and Policy Group had expressed explicit concern about the numbers of jobless who had lost all hope – as well as those who were said to enjoy subsidised unemployment – the ministerial release was focused almost exclusively on the cruisers. Among the eight segments of unemployed people identified by the researchers, these idle unemployed appeared to be the only ones deserving of the Minister’s scrutiny.

The media release adopted a format that emulated basic conventions of newspaper storytelling – it featured a headline and initial paragraph that summarised the gist of the story. In effect, the headline was a declaration of a war-like onslaught by the government as represented by the person of the Minister (Brough, 2002a, p 1):

Brough To Target “Cruising” Dole Recipients

The headline included military nomenclature that Golding and Middleton (1982, p 83) identified as common in reporting of welfare stories. The verb ‘target’ was taken from a lexical selection that also includes ‘attack ...crackdown...take aim...purge...blitz’. The headline verb also served to separate and isolate a specific group from the overall category of ‘the Australian people’ identified elsewhere in the body of the statement but who are also present by implication in the headline. As van Dijk (1988, p 70) notes, lexical choices such as those presented in the Minister’s headline may bring with them associations between ‘them-groups’ and ‘we-groups’; Brough, who as a Minister in a national government purports to represent all people, is announcing apparently punitive action against a minority of those people. Thus the headline serves also to implicitly classify and divide all people into two groups – those who are cruising dole recipients and all those others who are not.

In addition, and again in line with van Dijk’s analysis, the headline acts as a summary of the entire text and therefore suggests the main issue that Brough wishes to announce and to emphasise. If, as van Dijk proposes, readers start to guess at the overall meaning before interpreting an entire text, the headline will play a vital role, ‘because the topic

acts as a major control instance on the further interpretation of the rest of the text' (1988, p 34). The 'control instance' in the case of this media release acts by expressing the notion of foreshadowed action. The headline describes two actors, one active and one passive, one who is taking action and one who is, literally, the target. And, in line with the headline's focus, the main proposition it advances is not that these cruising dole recipients exist, but that they merit punitive action by the government. In terms of a subject-object relationship, it is not the cruisers but what they are about to receive that is being brought (by Brough) to the reader's attention. As a consequence of this proposition, readers may draw this logical inference – the existence of the cruisers is not in question.

As van Dijk reports, there is ample empirical research demonstrating that news discourse as expressed in newspaper stories is routinely arranged in categories including the summary (as indicated above), main events and related context, background, previous events and consequences (1988, p 57). These categories may be featured in any one news report in various hierarchies. When applied to the headline of the media release, the notion of categories makes explicit the main, organising principle underlying the purpose of the media release. Again, the prevailing idea is that of consequences. Valid alternative headlines could include references to the novel discovery or quantification of this group that is undeserving of taxpayer support. Instead, that notion is subsumed by the immediate announcement of foreshadowed action and the main proposition in the headline – and the text to follow, as will be seen – is expressed in the initial three words of the headline: 'Brought To Target'. To use a judicial metaphor, the focus is on the sentence, not the trial or the verdict.

Also notable in the headline is the use of quotation marks to emphasise the adjective ‘Cruising’. In the sense that news is about novelty, the word ‘cruising’ carried the burden of what hitherto had been unknown. Previously, Australians used the term ‘dole bludger’ to describe those who accepted unemployment payments while avoiding work. The term is understood across social and class boundaries and is effectively part of a national vernacular. Now the government was introducing new terminology. The quotation marks around cruising then, formed a self-referential device – the minister was effectively quoting himself as introducing a new label to a class of unemployed people. The cruiser label may be viewed as a feature of what van Dijk calls selected lexical registers that are sourced to the language of politics and social relations. In the cruiser context, van Dijk’s observation is particularly apt, for such registers are ‘(F)ull of new coinages, new words to denote new developments, or new ways to look at old affairs’ (1988, p 76).

In addition, it may be argued that the quotation marks around the cruiser label also operate on a second level by drawing attention to the word. In the context of the headline, it could be argued that these inverted commas serve as the rhetorical gun sight through which readers are invited to focus on the Minister’s target.

Following on from the headline, the initial paragraphs provided information to justify the Government’s declaration. And again, the consequences precede and take priority over the subject of those consequences. Van Dijk’s notion of coherence (1988, p 25) – being

the relationship between bits of information or propositions in a text – is applicable here. The syntactical arrangements governing the opening paragraph reflect the political and power relationship between the protagonists. The government comes first, is powerful and active, while the dole cruisers are relegated to a subordinate and passive position. Metaphorically, the Government is the judge who reverses the usual order in which findings of guilt precede declaration of sentence. Thus the media release begins by stating that:

The Howard Government is set to disrupt the lifestyle of 'cruising' dole recipients, who enjoy being unemployed and have no intention of genuinely seeking work.

Employment Services Minister, Mal Brough, said research commissioned by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) indicated that as many as one in six 'job seekers' were not really seeking jobs at all.

'These people are content to collect a benefit from the Australian taxpayer and feel that work would have a negative impact on their quality of life and free time,' Mr Brough said. (Brough, 2002a, p1)

The form of action foreshadowed in the lead paragraph of the release – the disruption - is not initially specified. The government declared itself in position to take action – 'is set to disrupt' – and applied a similarly active stance to the target group, for they were people who 'enjoy[ed]' their status and had 'no intention' of looking for a job; the adverb modifying this 'seeking' is a significant semantic add-on; 'genuinely' serves to emphasise its absent antonyms and an implication of deception (in whatever job seeking they may do) for these people were being depicted as sham, bogus, or fake job seekers.

The second paragraph introduced the Employment Services Minister as the source of the announced plans and knowledge about the cruisers and their numbers. Mr Brough's

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 'commissioned research (which) indicated that as many as one in six 'job seekers' were not really seeking jobs at all.' In contrast to the direct stance of the headline and lead paragraph, the second paragraph qualified the information with a degree of equivocation. The research 'indicates' – that is, points to or suggests – that some job seekers are not genuine. A second qualifier is contained in the phrase 'as many as'. Thus there is an implied maximum of one in six job seekers in the relevant category. A minimum must therefore be inferred but no information is offered in that direction. This tactic of qualification also includes the use of the ratio as a device. Possible extrapolation is implicit in the ratio; if as many as one in six job seekers are dole cruisers, then a maximum total number of dole cruisers can be estimated by using simple arithmetic, based on the (then current) total number of job seekers. Notably, this potential total number of cruisers is absent from the text.

Here, again, van Dijk's theorising may be usefully applied to the Brough media release. The text includes what van Dijk (1988, p 85) describes as 'persuasive content features' that serve to emphasise its factual nature and thereby implicitly assert that the government's position is based on real, truthful, empirical research. In particular, the use of numbers – the ratio (and, elsewhere in the text, a percentage) – is 'predominantly meant as signals of precision and hence of truthfulness'. If, as van Dijk argues, a text must be read as much for what is absent or omitted as for what is present (and presented), then the omission of the actual number of dole cruisers may be interpreted as significant. While foreshadowing action to punish the cruisers, the government appears unwilling to state the precise or even estimated number that must be available as a product of the

attitudinal research. In this, it is possible to infer a political motive on the government's part, for it represents itself as a strong defender of public interests while simultaneously distancing itself from responsibility for the existence of the cruisers.

Arguably, the government wishes to draw enough attention to the cruisers as would serve its policy and political interests but not to emphasize the actual quantum. Remaining silent about the specific number may be an appropriate strategy, given that the government might be criticised if the actual or purported number of cruisers was seen as so large as to be indicative of a policy failure on the government's part. In fact, as we will see in a forthcoming chapter, the media did produce a large, round number based on the Brough algorithm but the Minister neither uttered it nor was criticised in relation to it.

Thus the lexical register used in the media release involves precise descriptions of the individual characteristics and motives of unworthy people but only indirect mathematical formulae to express a critical issue. Put as a question, this is that if there are dole cruisers, how many are there? Well, the Government will only say that it is up to one in six or 16 per cent, of another, larger group. Readers – specifically, journalists who receive the media release – will have to work out the number for themselves.

The next two paragraphs are presented as direct quotations of Mr Brough. He refers to the offending category as '(T)hese people'. The reference arguably camouflages the imprecision of the asserted number of dole cruisers in the previous paragraph. 'These people are content to collect a benefit from the Australian taxpayer'. Here the cruiser

category – that of the dishonest or parasitical person – is differentiated from the wider set of those who do the right thing and pay tax. Significant here is the use of the definite article to signify the group of people who by implication and presupposition set a moral standard from which the cruisers deviate. Brough refers to ‘the Australian taxpayer’ rather than taxpayers. The Australian taxation system draws revenue from taxpayers in a variety of ways, including pay-as-you-earn taxation levied on wage or salary-earning employees, corporate and business taxes, and tax on other forms of income including share market dividends and capital gains. The proposition underlying ‘the Australian taxpayer’ requires a concept of a generic moral relationship between taxpayer and state – that is, all of us who are taxpayers are fitted into a single category defined by virtue. By implication, then, two phantom adjectives are present in the quotation:

These [*bad*] people are content to collect a benefit from the [*good*] Australian taxpayer.

The implicit presence of ‘us and them groups’ in the headline is thus reinforced by the Minister’s quoted speech. The quotation continues by attributing motive to the sham job seekers who “feel that work would have a negative impact on their quality of life and free time’. Here ‘feel’ is a synonym for think or believe but unlike those words it connotes a general attitude rather than a precise conviction or stance. ‘Quality of life’ and ‘free time’ are abstract concepts capable of a variety of interpretations. The paragraph contains and links a range of propositions – that the dole cruisers derive satisfaction by receiving a benefit from taxpayers; that their ambition is limited to receiving the benefit (they don’t want more than they’re getting); that paid employment would have adverse consequences for them; that these consequences would include loss of free (or leisure)

time and diminished quality of life. Here motive and ambition are attributed to the offending category. Then, in the next paragraph (the fourth):

They give genuine job seekers a bad name and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers (Brough, 2002a, p 1).

Brough indicates that the unacceptable actions of some unemployed people stigmatise all unemployed people. This proposition relies on a presupposition – that a third group of people (the Australian taxpayer or, by inference, the general public or community) – will not distinguish between diligent and shiftless unemployed people. A second presupposition is also present. This is that unemployment is a shameful or stigmatised condition. If some job seekers are counterfeit and thus contaminate real job seekers, then all job seekers have ‘a bad name’. Brough offers retaliation on behalf of the damaged reputations of true job seekers by invoking the same notion he previously had been seeking to replace; now, dole cruisers are revealed as dole bludgers, as well as people who have earned this epithet.

And because the concept of the feckless, jobless person has what Eardley and Matheson (1999, p 11) called such ‘ubiquity...in mass media and popular mythology’ there is no need for the minister to define the term now applied to the freshly minted dole cruisers. Implicit in the Minister’s statement is the presupposition that its intended recipients – journalists and the wider community – share a common frame of reference or, in van Dijk’s terms, a script that ‘represent(s) the stereotypical and consensual knowledge people have about actions, events and episodes in social life’ (1988, p 102). In this case, recipients of the statement could be expected to draw on scripts relating to the social

security system, to welfare fraud and its prevalence, work ethics, and the perceived moral flaws and deficiencies of people who accept the dole in preference to paid employment.

The media release offers more information about the empirical basis of the model of the cruisers. Here a basic tactic of the text is evident. It relies on emphasis through repetition, with the second paragraph's 'research commissioned by the Department' appearing again in the fifth paragraph as 'research commissioned by his department'.

Repetitive references to assertions of truth appear in:

- paragraph one – genuinely seeking
- paragraph eight – the first genuine research
- paragraph 12 – those who genuinely can't find work
- paragraph 17 – genuine job seekers

The group that the text depicts as the offended party – all those who are not dole cruisers – appears in:

- paragraph three – the Australian taxpayer
- paragraph seven – the Australian people
- paragraph 12 – taxpayers
- paragraph 14 – the Australian taxpayer

As to the characteristics attributed to the dole cruisers, these are repeated in a variety of ways in six separate paragraphs and in two other paragraphs that indirectly quote two research respondents identified by the researchers as cruisers. Collectively, the cruisers are presented in dichotomous terms that organise their alleged characteristics in a scheme of possession. In summary, they possess a willingness to act in certain, unacceptable ways while simultaneously lacking the work ethic that the government and, by

implication, the majority community, require of them. In relation to the cruisers' unacceptable actions, the Minister's release employs a variety of verb and adverb descriptors to compile a judgemental cruiser lexicon:

- paragraph one – (they) *enjoy* (and) *have* no intention
- paragraph three – (they) *are content* (and) *feel* (work would have a negative impact)
- paragraph six – (they) *choose*
- paragraph seven – (they) *are relaxed*
- paragraph 12 – (they) *are content* (and) *indulge* (in a vacation)
- paragraph 15 – (this group) *feels relaxed*

According to this detailed portrait of the cruisers, they are both active agents of their own fates and hedonists whose decisions are utterly self-centred and imply an insult to those whose contributions make the cruiser lifestyle possible. These aspects of the portrait – relying, as it appears to, on the rhetorical device of repetition - represent once more a feature of van Dijk's 'persuasive content' of news discourse (1988, p 85); here, the Minister's statement provides information with an emotional dimension. In effect, the information about the dole cruisers is personalised and there is a corresponding and implicit appeal to the emotions of all those who constitute the offended group. In this there is a form of the call and response technique employed between minister and congregation in some evangelical churches; the text purports to show how the cruisers 'feel' and thus raises the question – how, good reader, do you feel about this?

In these emotional dimensions of the cruiser portrait there is also correspondence with Chomsky and Herman's analysis of selected US media reports, in which they found qualitative material differentiating worthy and unworthy victims of political violence:

While the coverage of the worthy victim was generous with gory details and quoted expressions of outrage and demands for justice, the coverage of the unworthy victims was low-keyed, designed to keep the lid on emotions and evoking regretful and philosophical generalities on the omnipresence of violence and the inherent tragedy of human life. (1994, p 39)

Although still consonant with this aspect of propaganda model theory, the Minister's dole cruiser story inverts the features as analysed by Chomsky and Herman. It is the coverage of the unworthy victims that is generous with detail or, put another way, it is the dole cruisers who are the worthy victims in that they merit harsh criticism and demands that they be subject to justice. Either way, the rhetorical, lexical and semantic evidence in the media release is heavily weighted against the idle unemployed and in this way is used to validate the ideological foundations of the discourse. That is, the dole cruisers are blameworthy. The implicit source of blame is the Australian community; it is this group that establishes and maintains standards that the Government adopts as a framework for policy. Although the textual presence of the community as a virtuous majority is critical to the scheme of the Minister's welfare discourse – if the cruisers offended nobody, the Minister's judgemental voice could be silenced - this presence does not require a foreground position. As noted above, several explicit references to the taxpayer and the people are sufficient to establish what is in effect a jury appointed by the Minister to provide a pre-packaged condemnation of dole cruisers.

Indeed, as will be shown in the next section, it is the Minister who provides both the verdict and predicts the reactions of the court of public opinion.

8.2 Cruisers and ‘the Australian people’

With the dole cruisers established as being indistinguishable from dole bludgers, the media release then sets out from its fifth paragraph to detail the case against them:

Mr Brough said research commissioned by his department has developed a model which identified eight categories of job seekers, based on their attitudes towards work and the search for work.

'These categories (list attached) range from highly motivated, accept-anything job seekers to those who choose unemployment as a lifestyle. (Brough, 2002a, p 1)

These paragraphs contain a shift to a lexical register of technical terms, which invite associations with professional authority and credibility. The researchers have not done anything as basic as attempting to count and classify unemployed people; instead, they have ‘developed a model’ and, once developed, this model has ‘identified eight categories’. The media release text here does not define or describe the model, nor explain how it operated to classify a specific number of categories.

In the next consecutive paragraph (the seventh), the Minister himself selects a word from the technical register – segment – when he invokes the authority of a national constituency and passes judgment on the cruisers on its behalf:

What really upsets the Australian people is that there is a segment of job seekers – about 16 per cent – who are described as ‘cruising’ job seekers. That is, they are relaxed about being unemployed, do not want to work full-time, although they may supplement their income with part-time or casual work. (Brough, 2002a, p 1)

Again, the definite article differentiates ‘the Australian people’ from the offending category. In this context, ‘the people’ is effectively synonymous with ‘all (right thinking or acting) people’ – each of whom the statement indicates is an injured party. Similarly, although there could be a range of potential assumed responses towards the cruisers by non-cruisers (that is, the we-group), including hatred, derision, cynicism, dislike, contempt or even tolerance or indifference, the release proffers ‘upsets’, a term that evokes an emotional response. In short, Brough suggests that the community is – and will be – disturbed or distressed by the existence and actions of the cruisers. Such an implied reaction is in contrast to the alleged position of the cruisers, who are ‘relaxed’ about their unemployment. Indeed, the text’s use of ‘relaxed’ may be interpreted as an apt expression of the rhetorical attack on the cruisers, for those who relax are in antonymic opposition to those who work. Thus positioned by the Minister, the majority who work can only be ‘upset’ by those who choose not to.

Arguably, the release also employs a degree of cautious tact in relation to ‘the people’ by offering them semantic freedom to move within a range of implied reactions covered by ‘upsets’. Such linguistic flexibility is not offered to the dole cruisers. In addition, the use of the figure of ‘about 16 per cent’ has the effect of reinforcing the authority of the statement.

According to van Dijk (1988, p 81) news texts may feature opinion-controlled lexical choices that, in association with rhetorical strategies, indicate underlying ideological premises. Given its cumulative strong criticisms of the cruisers, the minister’s media

release may be read as employing a strategy of understatement when it seeks to simultaneously condense, describe and foreshadow what he asserts as a popular, mass opinion about a group of jobless people. And, in asserting the relaxed attitude of the cruisers – who are not worried about lacking fulltime work – the Minister demonstrates the underlying ideology on which his text is founded. This is that unemployment in all circumstances is an undesirable state and that the only appropriate response is a strenuous attempt to join (or rejoin) that class of people that the Minister both succinctly categorises and generalises as the Australian people.

The statement also contains an implicit interweaving of tenses. The ‘Australian people’ are only now told about the research pointing to the existence of dole cruisers in a ratio of as many as one to six, relative to all unemployed. The statement here is based on ideological presuppositions, that the Australian people don’t like dole bludgers and therefore will not like the new variant, once they’ve been informed. Thus Brough is able to assert that the newly discovered cruisers upset the public, even though they have yet to hear about them. In the implied time frame of the media release, the virtuous majority exist in a state of continuous critical response towards the bludging minority.

As noted above, the cruiser variant is further quantified with the description of ‘a segment of job seekers – about 16 per cent – who are described as ‘cruising job seekers’. The significant lexical choice here is the word drawn from market research jargon – ‘segment’. Elsewhere, in an attachment to the release, information about the research is provided. The references include ‘eight job-seeker segments’ identified by the research. Use of this

jargon again lends authority to the words because they invoke notions of technical and thus credible activity.

However, as noted earlier in this chapter, the actual size of the cruising segment is unclear. One in six approximates to a percentage of about 16 but nowhere in the release are there any references to total numbers, estimated or calculated on any other basis. Other than the references to ‘as many as one in six’ and its duplicate ‘about 16 per cent’, and, later, the use of a generalised descriptive label, ‘substantial’, the text is silent on the question of the actual numbers in the cruiser category. Nor does it state or indicate the method that produced the limited detail on numbers present in the text. A single reference to methodology is contained in paragraph nine – ‘the one-on-one interviews undertaken during the research phase’ (Brough, 2002a, p 2). What can be inferred from the release is that the cruiser segment represents about 16 per cent of the research population in all of the segments.

As we have seen in paragraph seven, a new element of qualification is introduced as more descriptive detail is added:

(T)hey are relaxed about being unemployed, do not want to work full-time, although they may supplement their income with part-time or casual work,’ (Brough, 2002a, p 1)

Thus the dole recipients who don’t intend to genuinely seek work in the first paragraph are now described as willing to work some of the time. In this regard, they could be similar to many other Australians who work on a casual or part-time basis.

From the eighth paragraph, the release returns to the theme of true knowledge produced by research; here the notion is asserted in direct speech from the Minister to be both validly based, methodologically sound and accurate in its results:

There has always been a certain amount of anecdotal evidence about the existence of these ‘cruisers’; however, this is the first genuine research that I am aware of that confirms the existence of a substantial body of non-performers in Australia. (Brough, 2002a, pp 1-2)

This part of the text expresses a theme that Golding and Middleton (1982, p 82) detected in British media coverage of welfare issues in the 1970s, that of ‘what everybody knows’. Here, Brough’s ‘anecdotal evidence’ is synonymous with common knowledge and as such, need not be defined or justified. This is a self-evident truth located in a realm that is effectively outside time – as Brough notes, it has ‘always’ been so – and perhaps the presence of this hyperbolic assertion explains the cautious qualifying reference to a ‘certain amount of’ evidence – that is, an unspecified degree of evidence, based on the stories people exchange about malingerers who in an older Australian vernacular wouldn’t work in an iron lung. Here the ideological stance of the text requires acceptance of the proposition that anecdote equals evidence. The rhetorical invocation of what everybody knows (where ‘everybody’ represents the Australian taxpayer or Australian people) involves a nexus that connects scripts of dole bludgers shared by groups including the political class who act as sources for journalists who convey information to their readers. The readers themselves may be defined in a variety of ways – as workers, voters, or members of different social or ethnic groups – but here virtually all can be assumed to recognise the dole bludger script. In the implicit terms of the media release, recognition is also synonymous with an implicit endorsement that is

simultaneously current and retrospective. After all, while the cruiser label is being presented as part of a new nomenclature, the media release makes clear that ‘these cruisers’ existed in the past. In effect, the Minister is reporting to the community that their own common knowledge was and is valid, even if it was based on only a ‘certain amount’ of evidence. Here and now, he says, is sufficient empirical proof.

In the Brough news release the script about the lazy unemployed is also being renovated akin to a tradition of Australian home ownership. The new script is bigger and better and it has a new foundation using an improved truth, the one produced by groundbreaking ‘genuine research’. The claim for the efficacy of the foundation product is both qualified – ‘the first...that I am aware of’ -- and unequivocal because this truth ‘confirms’ what was always known and is continuously known, that there are unemployed people who are ‘non-performers’ and that they exist in ‘substantial’ numbers.

8.3 Cruisers ‘will find it an embuggerance’

To this point, what could be described as the project of the media release is the Government’s foreshadowing of what is presented as justifiable action against the dole cruisers, in association with a broad description of their characteristics (‘content and relaxed’). Having indicated in paragraph eight – as outlined above – that the Government is in possession of unprecedented evidence about their prevalence, the release then provides a more detailed level of evidence by way of ‘examples from the one-on-one

interviews undertaken during the research phase [that] clearly illustrated the type of attitude [the Minister] was talking about.’ (Brough, 2002a, p 2)

Brough again uses emphasis to assert the veracity of the research findings, while simultaneously implying that there is no room for doubt or dispute for that which is clear will be evident to everybody and easily understood. At paragraphs 10 and 11, cruiser interviewees are presented as testifying, in effect, on behalf of the prosecution:

Jarrold (not his real name) is happy living on unemployment and supplements his income by playing musical gigs in pubs and busking. He enjoys the lifestyle of being unemployed and the freedom to read and write, and spend time with his friends and girlfriend. (Full extract attached)

David (not his real name) is 26 years old and has been unemployed off and on for the last 3 years, He enjoys the unemployed lifestyle because it allows him to be master of his own time and gives him freedom to do other things. (Full extract attached) (Brough, 2002a, p 2)

The example of the pseudonymous Jarrold differs from that of the cruiser David because the former provides specific information about the subject’s activities and relationships that is absent from the latter. What is common to both is that each man ‘enjoys’ the lifestyle – the same lifestyle identified in the first paragraph of the release – and each is a beneficiary of a powerfully significant value with multiple ideological meanings. This, of course, is freedom and it is, by implication, the very thing not available to the Australian people who are being exploited by Jarrold and David. The majority are not free from the demands of work.

In the 'research vignettes' (Brough, 2002a, pp 3-4) attached to the media release each man is described as confident; one is 'not interested' in working and the other is 'only interested' in 'nice jobs'. However, Jarrod is also said to have arranged an interview for a job. He is tertiary educated and is writing his 'memoirs'; he thinks of this as his 'work'. David rides a skateboard and, although 'confident', has unspecified 'issues with drugs and authority'. David has been unemployed 'off and on' for the last three years. His income from the dole is 'barely enough to survive on' and he earns more from 'under-the-table' casual work. David also 'feels' that employers can be 'judgemental about the way he looks'.

Inferences available in the vignettes include that Jarrod is a self-interested dilettante who has intellectual pretensions and is effete or soft; David is a drug dependent, immature adult who displays adolescent traits that are evident in his appearance, activities and behaviour.

The remaining paragraphs of the release repeat the main themes, including that cruisers exploit the Australian taxpayer and do so without any pangs of conscience. The theme of consequence is further detailed at paragraph 12, where the release introduces the concept of conditionality to unemployment payments. As noted in previous chapters, this concept is central in the notion of mutual obligation propounded by the government and spelled out here by its Minister:

The unemployment benefit is there for those who genuinely can't find work, and are prepared to make an effort to get into employment. It is not to support those people who

are content to collect a publicly funded benefit and indulge in a full-time or part-time vacation at taxpayers' expense. (Brough, 2002a, p 2)

The benefit, it appears, is therefore not for the dole cruisers. Despite this logical inference, Brough does not suggest that they will lose the benefit but only that they will be forced to take further action to justify receiving it. Underlying this aspect of the statement is the presence of an implicit limit on the Minister's political power or policy ambit. He harshly criticises the personal qualities of some of the welfare recipients for whom he bears both policy and administrative responsibility but stops short of any suggestion that they should be expelled from the system he represents.

Paragraphs 13 - 17 contain further threats and reveal what appears to be the Minister's plan for action, albeit one modified somewhat by a specific verb. Rather than expressing action in terms of a Ministerial directive, order or even request, the release chooses to represent his authority in more passive terms via a description of desire:

Mr Brough wants his department to identify 'cruising' dole recipients and make their lifestyle less attractive.

"If these so-called 'cruisers' think the Howard Government is going to allow them to take advantage of the generosity of the Australian taxpayer to fund their lifestyle choice, they have another thing coming,' Mr Brough said.

If this particular group of people feels relaxed about being unemployed, I intend to make them feel a lot less comfortable and far more active."

Mr Brough said a range of initiatives from Tuesday's Budget and the Australians Working Together package announced last year would broaden and intensify the participation and activity requirements of job seekers. (Brough, 2002a, p 2)

Having indicated that his strategy involves identification of cruisers, the Minister – at paragraph 14 – calls attention to the label he himself has attached to them, by referring to

the 'so-called' cruisers. It is unclear here whether the usage is intended to refer to the nomenclature invented by the social marketers or whether the Minister is, with a final linguistic flourish, expressing an element of personal contempt for these targets of his administrative and political power. Perhaps the underlying notion is that, based on all the evidence, they may or may not be cruisers but they definitely are bludgers. In this, it could be argued that the Minister is breaking free of the jargon of the researchers in order to speak bluntly and directly to the community. Brough's rhetoric makes clear that in the contest between the so-called cruisers and the generous taxpayer, there can be only one winner.

At paragraph 14 (the penultimate paragraph) the release provides more detail about what appears to be the cruiser strategy. There is, however, no specific information that relates to the cruisers. Instead, there is a 'range' of 'initiatives' that are sourced to two previous plans: the very recent Budget and another plan announced in 2001. Taken together, these initiatives appear to relate to all job seekers. If they have specific relevance to the dole cruisers, the release does not say.

The final paragraph – again directly quoting the Minister – contains prediction, assertion and assurance, for those job seekers who do the right thing will be untroubled by the new requirements. Implicit here is the notion that the requirements are fair and reasonable, and that compliant job seekers will experience this to be so. Here again is an expression of the Government's strategy of imposing controls on an entire group in order to discipline a subset of it. The rationale and justification for the strategy is based only on the subset.

However if a definition of ‘genuine job seeker’ is one who is really trying to get a job, and thus meeting all existing obligations, there can be no justification for imposing extra obligations. It is thus possible to infer that at least one reason for exerting extra control over the entire category of dole recipients is administrative. As the media release quotes the Minister:

‘Genuine job seekers will have no problem with the level of engagement involved. It is these ‘cruisers’ who will find it an embuggerance’ (Brough, 2002a, p 2).

Brough ends with a threat and incorrectly uses a lexical oddity to do so. Embuggerance is defined as having military colloquial provenance. According to the Macquarie Dictionary it is: ‘an unnecessary or irrelevant interruption in the completion of a task; an insignificant or irksome factor which will not prevent the achievement of the overall objective’.

The attachment to the news release provides information about ‘(T)he research’ which aimed to ‘develop a needs-based segmentation of job seekers, based on research previously conducted in New Zealand....Research on predictors of unemployment suggests that underlying factors such as motivation and work attitudes are crucial to job acquisition.’ The attachment lists the eight segments. These include the cruisers and ‘drivers’, ‘dependents’, ‘selectives’ and ‘struggling’, ‘drifting’, ‘disempowered’ and ‘withdrawn’ job seekers. (Brough, 2002a, p 3-5)

In summary, the news release contains a proposal to discipline some unemployed people whose behaviour is presented as unacceptable to the community. This behaviour is

depicted as stigmatising all unemployed people and thus justifies the proposed action. There can be no doubt about the offending behaviour because it has been identified by credible, truthful, original research. Although the research findings are depicted as unprecedented, they are simultaneously presented as no surprise because they confirm pre-existing and widely held beliefs.

The number of dole cruisers is not made explicit but is expressed in terms of a ratio, a percentage and an abstraction. The expressions are equivocal and qualified but amount to an unequivocal declaration – the cruisers are numerous.

The news release omits any reference to economic factors relevant to employment and unemployment, including the proliferation in the Australian economy of part-time and casual work relative to fulltime employment, and regional disparities in employment rates. A month before the cruiser news, the unemployment rate for Melbourne's inner suburbs was three per cent. Parts of Sydney and Queensland's Darling Downs had unemployment rates of less than four per cent. By contrast, many other regions had rates of more than eight per cent, with the NSW Hunter region highest at 11.1 per cent unemployment (James, 2002, p 54). The Brough release makes no reference to regional differences and implies a single standard by which the search for work is to be judged. In this context, the search is an end in its own right, connected to the receipt of the dole and to an implied moral standard set by representatives of the community. The pursuit of work is not linked to any relative or generalised prospects of success, including those related to competition between job seekers. Indeed, on one view, where work is

relatively scarce, the fact that some people are unenthusiastic about seeking it is likely to have little effect on unemployment rates, because others will fill existing vacancies (Bradbury et al, in Eardley and Matheson, 1999, p 9).

Thus, the Minister's media release made no reference to the range of factors, including competition, which might affect the fortunes of job seekers. A previous section of this thesis has noted that the Minister's departmental advisers told him in their briefings that the cruisers were not the only category of job seekers of concern in policy terms. In particular, the bureaucrats were also troubled by the apparent prevalence of those who had lost all hope of finding work and were now known, in the new nomenclature, as the disempowered and the withdrawn.

Set against the content of those departmental briefings, the text of the media release detailed above indicates that the Minister or his office applied a reductive process to the attitudinal research findings and the associated policy advice provided by the department. In short, the Minister appeared to find the dole cruiser findings to be of paramount significance, so much so that there would be no public emphasis on any of the seven other job seeker categories that the company Colmar Brunton had described. This lack of focus was reflected in the media release. All eight segments were briefly described in the last section of the release and, in effect, relegated to the background of the ministerial statement. Through a strategy of direct reference and omission, Brough's statements made clear that his focus was solely on the dole cruisers. He was silent on what, if any

action was proposed in relation to the other segments, particularly those that the Minister's department appeared to find worthy of concern.

Notably, the 'range of initiatives' that would 'broaden and intensify' the requirements imposed on job seekers appeared not to have been informed by the attitudinal research used by the Minister to expose and condemn the cruisers. After all, some of the initiatives had been announced in the previous year as we have seen; the others had been revealed in the government's 2002-2003 Budget which preceded DEWR's provision of the second of two internal briefings to the Minister.

With the preparation of the media release, the Minister was positioned to publicly disclose a new phase of his government's continuous policy focus on the job search obligations of unemployed people. How the Minister managed this disclosure through initial contact with selected media outlets is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 9

9.1 Media strategy

The government's apparent discovery of a huge and quantifiable mass of dole bludgers had national policy implications. It was, arguably, significant news. However, instead of seeking to communicate with as much of the community as possible, the government chose to disseminate the news on a selective basis. It gave the story to two newspapers only – the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney and the *Courier Mail* in Brisbane. Both papers are owned and published by News Limited.

There appears to be no available evidence to explain why the government chose such a narrow initial basis on which to release the dole cruiser story. However, Putnis' (2001, p 87) analysis provides a possible explanation. Putnis demonstrated that in comparison to two broadsheet papers, the two tabloid newspapers in his sample (one of them the *Daily Telegraph*) published three times as many stories in which what he described as anti-welfare images predominated. In addition, the tabloids published a much greater proportion of readers' letters endorsing anti-welfarism than did the broadsheets. These findings, albeit limited by the size of the Putnis sample, suggest that the tabloids were predisposed to a critical stance in relation to the real or alleged sins of some welfare recipients. If so, such a stance would be congruent with both the government's specific criticism of the dole cruisers and more broadly its policy focus over time on those unemployed deemed to be defying community expectations in relation to job search.

Thus a possible motive for the government's exclusive provision of the dole cruiser story to two tabloids is that the government had a reasonable expectation that these newspapers would frame the story in terms that would meet the government's approval; that is, that the reporting would reflect or even support the government's focus on the dole cruisers as welfare recipients who were deserving of public criticism and administrative sanctions.

In broader terms, it is also relevant here to note Chomsky and Herman's notion that elite interests provide a service to the news media and in return receive 'privileged access' in relation to media coverage of their interests (1988, p 22). According to the propaganda model, institutional sources such as governments contribute to the media's continuous need for the 'raw materials' of news. The media responds, according to Chomsky and Herman, by treating such contributors as privileged sources. The relationship between media and source is thus one of mutual benefit and privileged access proceeds in both directions. The media continues to receive supplies of the information it requires to produce news, and the sources receive both special access to news media in order to represent their interests, and, arguably, benefits such as authority and credibility as a result of that routine access. In line with the propaganda model then, the selective release of the dole cruiser story is simply one example of a form of gift giving between elite interests. It may be argued, too, that in the case of the dole cruisers, the gift provided by the government carried extra significance because it came in an exclusive form. Implicit in this form would be a message to the recipient newspapers that they were beneficiaries of something out of the ordinary. As official sources, governments regularly dispense information to news media, either by initiating this provision or by responding to media

inquiries; governments do not, however, hand out exclusive stories to journalists on a daily basis. To do so would diminish the value of such stories, both for provider and recipients.

The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier Mail* published similar reports about the dole cruisers on Monday 20 May 2002, four days after the Minister's office received the second of the two departmental briefings about the attitudinal segmentation research. The presence of identical quotes and information in each story indicated that the writers had been given the Brough media release described in the previous chapter; this release was also subsequently distributed widely around the country on the day the two papers published. With one exception, the remaining 13 newspapers sampled for my research published their versions of the cruiser story one day after the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail*.

The following chapter considers how those two newspapers presented the story to their readers and the extent to which these presentations endorsed a specific welfare discourse outlined by the government.

Chapter 10

10.1 ‘Australia’s true dole bludgers’

The *Daily Telegraph* (DT) and the *Courier Mail* (CM) are daily newspapers in, respectively, the biggest and third biggest cities in Australia.

On 20 May 2002, The *Telegraph* published its exclusive story on page seven, under the by-line of chief political reporter, Malcolm Farr; the *Courier Mail*’s version – by reporter Denis Atkins – was placed on the front page, under the headline:

‘Bludgers’ to lose benefits.

The CM headline used quotation marks to indicate that the newspaper was not the source of the colloquialism ‘bludgers’. The headline succinctly cast the story in consequential terms – ‘to lose’ – with consequence portrayed as an act by the subject group. An external agent is not taking the unidentified benefits; they are being lost by the bludgers who are implicitly responsible for the impending loss. The headline also implies questions that require the reader to go to the text for the answers – which bludgers and what benefits?

The DT ran with a more complex headline that linked propositions regarding individuality and individual choice with others concerning implicit investigative action, revelation and truth on a national scale:

I'd rather sit on the beach than work – Exposed: Australia's true dole bludgers

The DT headline combined elements of the dole bludger stereotype with a broad notion of leisure, Australian-style. 'The beach' is an egalitarian place of pleasure in which social barriers may be temporarily dissolved and where elemental features dominate – surf, sand, sun, sexuality. In Australian culture it represents the usually temporary retreat or escape from the routines and disciplines of work but here, 'Australia's true dole bludgers' annex a piece of sand, with the act based on a preference – 'rather' – and, arguably, a subtle physical positioning that differentiates them from more legitimate beachgoers. The latter, who we may infer have earned their moment in the sun, could be expected to lie, laze, or relax on the beach but the bludgers 'sit'. The act of sitting can be interpreted as active and connected to work, in offices, or in making judgements or controlling machinery but the offender category of the DT headline may be lexically connected to a condition of laziness, where Australians speak of those who sit on their bums – that is, do nothing.

The headline also draws on implicit notions of deviance by using 'exposed', a word that draws attention to that which was what previously hidden because of unsavoury or shameful qualities. As noted previously, there are ample references in the literature to the role of news media in identifying the deviant activities or behaviours of certain groups or individuals. Exposure brings with it a clear virtuous light that eliminates the despicable, concealing darkness. Finally, the headline provides its own judgement about its own veracity – the subject is the nation's 'true' dole bludgers. With this word, one that comes

free of quotation marks, the headline implicitly establishes and endorses what is to follow. The entire headline is a creative and hyperbolic extrapolation from the text. The motivations and goals of the numerous cruisers are condensed and imagined as a paraphrased first person statement, with the 'I' of the headline standing for the entire group. The inferential basis of the headline is to be found in the last line of the text of the *Telegraph* report. This refers to 'Adam' whose 'ideal lifestyle would be to work in the winter and then enjoy the summer' (Farr, 2002, p 7). The *Telegraph's* headline writer presumes that Adam's summer does not take place in arid inland locations like Cobar or Alice Springs.

The lead paragraphs presented in each newspaper are notable for several reasons. First, each introduces the number absent from the Brough release. Farr 's intro is presented as a statement: 'One in six of those on the dole, about 100,000 people, have no intention of genuinely looking for work' (2002, p 7)

Akins also knows how many dole cruisers exist and provides the information in a similar declarative form: 'More than 100,000 unemployed people will be targeted in a Federal Government crackdown after being identified as bludgers with no interest in finding work' (2002, p 1)

Also notable is the credibility and validity assigned by each lead paragraph to the asserted existence and claimed size of the cruiser category. The DT is unequivocal – these people exist and they do so in about this number. Significantly, the newspaper reports the

information provided by the Government without attribution and thus elevates the information to the level of a stated, unqualified truth. Thus the DT endorses the Government's story in the initial, 19-word paragraph.

The CM takes a similar approach. The Brisbane newspaper also presents the numbers and provides the consequential link – 'will be targeted' before initially explaining the reason for the action – 'after being identified'. Endorsement of the veracity of the source information is implicit – the cruisers exist in certain specific numbers and they will be targeted because they have been identified. Thus they do exist. Past, present and future are wrapped into the one sentence. The CM identifies the government as the agent of the 'crackdown' (a favourite term of the welfare-reporting genre) but does not provide direct attribution for any of the propositions present in the lead. However, as van Dijk asserts, news discourse relies in part on journalists' presuppositions about 'vast amounts of social and political knowledge and beliefs' (1988, p 62). In this case, readers may be expected to know, among other things, that the Federal Government holds authority over the social security system and thus will be the likely source of the identification of the unemployed as bludgers.

Specific attribution and explanation do follow in the *Courier Mail's* second and third paragraphs, along with an indication that the paper has obtained the story ahead of its actual, official release:

Employment Services Minister Mal Brough will release details today of a national survey of the unemployed.

The survey found the two biggest groups of unemployed were those highly motivated and those happy to be on the dole, called Cruisers. (Atkins, 2002, p 1)

The corresponding DT paragraphs also provide attribution and introduce the new nomenclature for dole bludgers, although the Sydney paper does not use the proper noun form adopted by its sister in Brisbane:

These “cruisers” have been identified by the first significant research into who takes unemployment benefits and why.

The Department of Employment study, based on polling of 3000 dole recipients, found 16 per cent were motivated to find work and were open to all job opportunities. Employment Services Minister Mal Brough said yesterday at the other extreme there was a group, also of 16 per cent, the cruisers, who were relaxed about being unemployed and were not looking for work. (Farr, 2002, p 7)

Again, the DT’s approach involves endorsement of source material but here it also provides a transformation of the material. Brough’s ‘first genuine research that I am aware of’ becomes Farr’s ‘first significant research’. The original adjective is subsumed in the new one. The research remains genuine – if it wasn’t it could not now be significant (in the way presented by Brough and Farr) – but it has also gained a new level of meaning, importance or even application. The presence of the new adjective opens a link between the semantic and the overtly political because the research is not only presented as truth but also because it acts as the catalyst for action by the government. The truth in the significant research signifies truth or validity in the government’s response. One true thing leads to another, and in the case of the story telling about the cruisers, this truth will have consequences.

In both newspaper reports, the truth is presented in terms that may be considered by referring, as in a previous section, to van Dijk's concept of persuasive content (1988, p 85). In particular the reports emphasise the factual basis of the government's story, provide information that features precise details, and, as we will see, also outlines an emotional dimension that features the personal reactions of members of the Government.

How the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* presented the story in terms of persuasive content will be considered in the following section.

10.2 'Shocked Government Ministers'

As demonstrated, the two exclusive cruiser stories not only named but numbered the cruisers; each lead paragraph quantified the dole cruiser population as 'about' or 'more than' 100,000 people. The number was clearly produced by applying the Brough cruiser ratio of one in six job seekers to the total number of unemployed; as reported in section 3.1, the national unemployment pool totalled 622,300 people in April 2002.

In the following paragraphs of both stories, each journalist provided details about the research. Both gave information not present in the news release. The *Telegraph's* Farr writes about 'The Department of Employment study, based on polling of 3000 dole recipients' (2002, p 7). Atkins quotes Brough who 'said his department's research (was) based on face-to-face interviews and a survey of 3000 unemployed' (2002, p 1).

As we will see in a forthcoming section, the Government did disclose information about a survey of unemployed people – but in a second media release. This was issued on 21 May 2002 – the day after the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* published their exclusive reports.

It may be assumed that the Minister's office provided the information about the survey to the two newspapers. It is unclear, however, why that same office withheld the information from the Minister's initial media statement released on 20 May, given that such information could be seen as strengthening the validity and credibility of the cruiser research.

Indeed, the research was subject to criticism in one of the two initial newspaper reports. The CM report included a single sentence representing a critical response in the fourth paragraph. This sentence was linked, in the same paragraph, to what is effectively the government's response to its unidentified critics, thus: 'Welfare groups condemned the research as demonising the ranks of the unemployed. But the Government is confident the community supports any crackdown on jobless people seen as lazy and not motivated'. (Atkins, 2002, p 1)

The 'welfare groups' are not identified but portrayed generically; they provide what can be characterised as a generic criticism drawn from a welfare discourse in which harsh authorities dehumanise and brutalise powerless people. In such a discourse the welfare groups lay claim to the compassion absent in their opponents, who may retaliate by characterising the welfarists as bleeding hearts. In the hierarchy of the cruiser story,

however, the nameless welfare groups play a cameo role, with no opportunity provided to respond substantively to the government's assertions. Arguably, the syntactical arrangements of the report's fourth paragraph reflect the relationship of critics to government, for the former are associated with a verb inflection of past tense – 'condemned' – while the government occupies the central ground of the present, so that it 'is confident' of its position.

In any event, the criticism, as expressed in the *Courier Mail*, relates to the government's alleged motives and not to any substantive issues raised by the cruiser research. These go unchallenged by those who might be expected to have relevant expertise.

The CM story adds more information about the government viewpoint and offers more implicit endorsement of the credibility of the government's research, in the fifth paragraph: 'Mr Brough said...[the] finding that as many as one in six people on the dole were not seeking jobs had shocked Government Ministers and department officials.'
(Atkins, 2002, p 1)

Information about this intense personal reaction by individuals in government is not found in any other press reports about the dole cruisers. The presence of this information in the Atkins' report is a sign of possible direct contact between the journalist and either Brough or a representative of him. According to journalistic practice, the transformation of source material like the media release is often accompanied by contact between agents of the source and journalists. It may be that alone among journalists who spoke to the

minister or his staff, Atkins was told of this 'shocked' reaction. Indeed he may have asked his source for information about the reaction of government members and officials to the material. Among many scholars, van Dijk (1988, p 120) notes that novelty and relevance are features of news values, but Atkins does not seek to emphasise the originality of the cruiser research or that its contents had the apparent capacity to startle, astonish or astound those whose work involves unusual levels of knowledge about unemployment. It is not until the fifth paragraph of the CM report that readers are told that (Brough said) the research 'was the first genuine data which broke down the jobless into key groups' and that people in government were shocked by some findings.

Both the DT and CM reproduce the Brough assertion that dole cruisers give real job seekers a bad name and deserve the dole bludger label. The CM transforms the original Brough quote – 'What really upsets the Australian people' into indirect speech: 'Mr Brough said the 16 per cent identified as Cruisers upset most Australians who did not believe the group deserved unemployment benefits' (Atkins, 2002, p 1).

The CM qualifies Brough's 'the Australian people' by substituting the phrase 'most Australians'. Brough attributes a belief to a majority of the community about the provision of welfare benefits. The original release contains no such attribution. Nor does it capitalise Cruiser as the CM does in four separate references. Capitalisation confers official status on the offending category and serves to separate it from the stereotypical, lower-case dole bludger. To use a supermarket analogy, the big C cruisers are not a no-frills item but a name brand in their own right and thus authentic and more memorable.

Again, the newspaper's presentation of the story acts to validate the existence of the subject group.

10.3 Michael and Adam

The two newspapers provided more evidence of the authenticity of the dole cruiser story in two excerpts from the vignettes. The CM reports:

Focus group interviews were used to compile profiles of the Cruiser group.

One jobless youth, called Michael, was on the dole and playing music in pubs and busking. He told researchers he enjoyed the freedom to write and read and spend time with his girlfriend.

Another Cruiser, named Adam, said the Job Network should be doing more for him, although he was not interested in finding work. (Atkins, 2002, p 1)

Recall that the name Michael is substituted here for Jarrod who is described by Brough in the full extract as a tertiary educated 34-year-old who has an interview pending and is writing about his overseas travels. The CM report transforms the adult Jarrod into a 'jobless youth'. Similarly, David becomes Adam. The former is described in the full extract in the media release as having had a difficult childhood and as having supported himself since the age of 14. David has 'issues with drugs and authority', finds casual work 'under the table' through his own efforts because the dole is 'barely enough to survive on' and thinks his Job Network Provider has given him no help and should do more. David is said to be unsure about what he wants to do and, 'at present' does not want a full-time job (Brough, 2002a, pp 3-4). The CM's Adam is portrayed as wanting others to act for him while he expresses no interest in employment. In each case here, the

newspaper has selected details that create negative portraits that can be read as supporting the government's case. Michael has an easy, even enviable life involving music, pubs, leisure and intimate female company. Adam is childish and expects the world to support him. The condition of each is predicated on the support of taxpayers.

The DT excerpts also involve the name change for each respondent but accurately apply other details including age to Michael and Adam. In the latter's case, the DT summarises selectively: 'Adam: 26, supporting himself since 14. Adam enjoys being unemployed as it allows him the time to do the things he wants. He supplements his dole with under-the-counter payments from casual jobs. He doesn't want a fulltime job and his ideal lifestyle would be to work in the winter and then enjoy the summer'.(Farr, 2002, p 7)

Described as Case 1 (Michael/Jarrold) and Case 2 (Adam/David) these lines appear at the end of the DT report. The final line both informs the reader about the origin of the information in the cases and also serves to provide a succinct additional validation of the information's veracity: 'Source: Department of Employment profiles of two men who don't want work.' (Farr, 2002, p 7)

The two newspapers scrutinised here also published the details of all eight attitudinal segments categorised in the media release. The CM reported that 'Mr Brough said' the categories 'ranged from very highly motivated job seekers called Drivers, to those who had settled into life on the dole and did not even bother to look for work' (Atkins, 2002, p 1). The asserted characteristics of the other six categories are detailed, with references to

relative levels of confidence, self-belief, possession or lack of ambition, medical or psychological conditions and relative levels of knowledge relevant to the pursuit of work.

Implicit in the CM and DT reports is the notion that among the eight categories, only the cruisers are worthy of attention and government action. Brough's focus is on the cruisers, and if the other categories raise implications for policies on unemployment and labour markets, then they are absent from the current focus. The government's stated focus is on the cruisers and both the Sydney and Brisbane newspapers replicate that focus.

The dominant feature of the dole cruiser reporting analysed thus far is its endorsement of the content of the Minister's announcement. In the *Daily Telegraph* and *Courier Mail*, the proposition that there are 100,000 Australians who are maintaining an enjoyable life on the dole is unchallenged. The subject is so treated by journalistic techniques of summarisation and simplification, as well as omission of attribution. Also notably absent from each of the reports are questions or statements regarding the administrative or political implications of the existence of so numerous a group of malingerers. After eight years of administrative and rhetorical pressure on the unemployed, the government reveals that 100,000 of its targets are apparently untroubled. The newspapers ignore this. They also accept and amplify an ideological model of the economy in which people without jobs can be characterised as solely responsible for their situation. The papers implicitly validate a corresponding moral economy, in which majority opinion justifies appropriate punishment for the guilty few who in turn are both the recipients and the

source of a general stigma of unemployment. The cruiser/dole bludgers can be blamed for what they are and for causing ‘the people’ to think badly of them.

On 20 May 2002 – the day of initial publication by the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* – the story began to spread to other print media outlets. How these newspapers treated the information will be considered in the following section.

10.4 ‘Un-Australian and immoral’

On the morning of 20 May, the news agency Australian Associated Press (AAP) picked up the story that had appeared first in the two News Limited publications.

The news agency produced four versions of the dole cruiser story for distribution to its media subscribers around Australia. The timing and sequence of transmission of these reports is unclear but it is possible to infer this from the content and datelines of each report. The likely sequence is as follows, with each headline and intro presented here in the order of expected production:

[1] Brough sets sights on cruising dole recipient

CANBERRA, May 20 AAP – The federal government is planning a crackdown on dole bludgers after research found 16 per cent of dole recipients enjoyed the welfare lifestyle and had no intention of genuinely seeking work.

[2] Dole-bludgers un-Australian: Anderson

SYDNEY, May 20 AAP – People receiving the dole who were not actively looking for work were un-Australian and immoral, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson said today.

[3] Govt calls dole bludgers immoral

CANBERRA, May 20 AAP – People enjoying life on the dole and not looking for a job were immoral and un-Australian, the federal government said today.

[4] Government is blaming jobless victims, says welfare group

BRISBANE, May 20 AAP – The federal government was blaming the victim in its push to crackdown on supposed dole bludgers, a social welfare group said today.

The initial report in the sequence originated in Canberra and adopted elements of the form and content of the Brough media release. It is likely that AAP instructed its Canberra bureau to obtain the story after the agency became aware of the cruiser story published by the *Telegraph* or *Courier Mail*. The second and third paragraphs of the initial AAP version attributed to the Minister the statements that:

Research by his department proved the existence of a substantial body of “non-performers” who were content to remain on the dole.

He said the research showed up to one in six registered job seekers were not really looking for work.

This initial report employs different labels for the Minister’s target, describing them in the intro as ‘dole recipients’ and then as ‘registered job seekers’ in the third paragraph quoted above. According to social security arrangements, people who registered as unemployed could be on a range of social security benefits or in receipt of no benefit whatsoever. The interchangeable use of the terms by AAP staff indicates an uninformed stance based on either potential confusion or indifference in relation to at least one fundamental truth element in the reporting – this being the actual nature of the group being subjected to government and media attention.

In providing information concerning the truth of the government's statement, AAP paraphrases elements of the Minister's media release. Although that text variously described the cruiser research as having indicated and confirmed their existence, the news agency copy attributes to the Minister the notion that the research has provided proof – this being vital in any trial.

The second of the AAP sequence of reports carried a Sydney dateline and featured comments by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson. These comments were summarised in the AAP headline and further detailed in the first four of the 11 paragraphs in the report. The intro reproduced above was followed by comments by Anderson that extended and amplified the theme of virtuous behaviour in the context of a generalised notion of national identity:

“Moral standards and decency do matter,” he said in Sydney.

“It is just not right to expect the community to support you if you're fully capable of working but you're deliberately shirking work.

That's not the Australian way. “

Together with Brisbane, Sydney was one of the two sites of initial reporting of the dole cruiser story. Given that journalistic practice routinely involves the acquisition of responses to new stories by recognised sources – including politicians – it is likely that AAP staff were aware of the presence in Sydney of the Deputy Prime Minister and sought his comment about the dole cruisers. Anderson, notably, appears to have been the only government minister other than Brough to make public comment on 20 May about the government's research.

It is unclear whether and to what extent Anderson had prior knowledge of the attitudinal segmentation research. The focus of his comments as reported by AAP, however, was clearly based on notions of deviance and control. Anderson provided a series of declarative statements – these people are this, and this, and not that – and what van Dijk (1988, p 34) describes as the macro (or main) proposition underlying the series indicates implicitly but unequivocally that ‘they’ are not like ‘us’. We are worthy, they are not; we operate with and conform to appropriate values while they transgress and reject those values.

To express this differentiation between the categories of lazy unemployed and those who by implication belong to a broader class of worthy citizens, Anderson implicitly broadened the scope of his critique beyond issues relating to job search and state support of the unemployed. It is, generally, a matter of ‘moral stands and decency’ that the Deputy Prime Minister explicitly contrasts with a generalised immorality and apparent rejection of a suite of values that attached to what purports in his comments to be concepts not only of Australian identity but also an alleged Australian mode of behaviour. These concepts and attached values are not identified by Anderson but remain as underlying elements – in line with van Dijk’s notion of the iceberg metaphor of press reporting, where unexpressed ideological suppositions inform a text and may be understood through frames of reference that can be expected to be recognised, if not necessarily endorsed, by a majority of the story audience. As van Dijk puts it, ‘only the

top of the information is visible as expressed information in the discourse itself' (1988, p 62).

By implication, also, Anderson's declarations position his critique as unarguable statements of fact, rather than a series of expressions of opinion based on an appeal to abstract and generalised values such as 'decency'. The AAP report acts as a vehicle to convey these declarations but does not otherwise provide any challenge to them. Indeed, the local organization of the declarations (in terms of a top-down hierarchy) demonstrates that Anderson's condemnation of some jobless people on moral and citizenship grounds (un-Australian) has been effectively privileged as the major topic in the story. The first third of the story focuses solely on the politician's standards-based judgements. (It should be acknowledged, however, that AAP's report of Anderson's comments appears to be a follow-up story and that the report's emphasis of the moral critique is in line with a standard journalistic practice that requires the 'newest' information to dominate in organisational – or top-down – terms.)

Only at the fifth paragraph does the report provide an indication, first, of consequences for the work shirkers, and second, a rationale for Anderson's comments:

Mr Anderson said the government would consider how best to deal with the 16 per cent of jobseekers who, according to government-commissioned research, were content to be on the dole.

He said such people would anger the wider community and the government's response would be in line with its focus on mutual obligation.

Anderson's description of the government's response – 'would consider how best to deal' – contrasts with the explicit threats seen in the various newspaper reports of Brough's statement. The single reference to mutual obligation – and absence of any explanatory or interpretive material about this phrase – indicates that the AAP staff who prepared the report expected their audience to recognise and understand the phrase as a short descriptor of government policy on unemployed people.

However, the following (seventh) paragraph does provide a contextual, if indirect description of the government's policy stance, along with further examples of the Deputy Prime Minister's lexical choices to identify preferred virtuous behaviour on the part of those who receive State support. In addition, and in line with van Dijk's approach, the quote contains presuppositions that provide implicit information about the validity of the government's policy stance. These presuppositions are contained within linked sets of chronological terms that apply to the Minister and his colleagues and to community members:

“Over the years we've made it very plain that we think those seeking support from the community in their hour of need should be prepared to do something in return for it,” he said.

“If you're not real and sincere about wanting work, I'm not sure that the community is going to feel too happy about supporting you.”

Anderson links principles of civic obligation to individualistic behaviours ('real and sincere') and twice invokes the concept of community support; he also effectively renders down complex notions of unemployment to a single proposition that would usually be read in terms of temporary personal crisis – 'in their hour of need' – rather than as a

nexus of social, political and economic factors affecting individuals and communities. That hour of need is preceded in the Andersonian chronology by an invocation of what can be read as time-honoured practice, if not tradition, for the government has candidly expressed its position 'over the years'. Thus the Minister implicitly argues that his government is 'real and sincere' because of the enduring consistency of its policy position. Once again those who do not share community values (including sincerity) should not now be surprised if they incur a generalised animosity.

Notably, Anderson's lexical selection also includes constructions that appear to express meaning as a polar opposite to what is presented. Thus: 'I'm not sure' - may be interpreted as 'I am sure' and 'I'm not sure that the community is going to feel too happy' means 'the community will be very unhappy'. These interpretations are congruent with the overall topic and theme of the text.

The final paragraphs of the AAP report concern Anderson's response to:

claims the issue [about dole bludgers] was raised by Employment Services Minister Mal Brough as a distraction from the furore over the government's crackdown on disability pensions, outlined in last Tuesday's Budget.

"I think that is an absolute load of nonsense," he said.

"I am all for supporting people in need and always will be but it has to be properly targeted, it has to be sustainable and it's time we got a little integrity in the debate about the disability services pension."

Once again, Anderson invokes abstract notions of morality – ‘a little integrity in the debate’ – while simultaneously indicating implicitly that it is the government’s critics who lack integrity.

For its part, AAP provides no attribution for those claims that Anderson rejects initially with a rhetorical show of force via the somewhat hyperbolic ‘absolute load of nonsense’ and then by linking a generalised statement of unqualified principle – ‘all for...and always will be’ with a set of specific policy objectives concerning the recipients and cost of support. Scrutiny of what van Dijk calls the local coherence links – that is, relationships between propositions in a text – indicates an apparent contradiction in the Anderson statement about supporting people. As van Dijk puts it, such scrutiny ‘[En]ables us to make explicit the tacit assumptions and beliefs of the speaker/writer...’ (1988, p 64).

Thus while Anderson represents his conviction as absolute and eternal, he also posits it as conditional and limited, for targeting must by definition exclude some people and so too must notions of expense. In addition, the adverb attached to the targeting concept – ‘properly’ – operates in ideological and political terms as an extra caveat or restriction on the original assertion of universal favour for welfare support because what is proper is likely to be what Anderson and his government deem it to be.

Meanwhile, with the source of the claims unidentified, they appear effectively as background against the Deputy Prime Minister’s argument, and thus lack an overt context or, arguably, credibility. In contrast, the identified sources in the story are two senior

Government members, each signified by name and title. Anonymity is pitted against what both Chomsky and Herman and van Dijk see as elite sources that, as the latter argues, are presented by news media as more newsworthy and credible (1988, p 82).

The third AAP version of the story was produced in Canberra and incorporated quotes from the Sydney report about Anderson and other material from the Brough media release. Although this Canberra version gave the more junior minister precedence in the scheme of the story, the summarising headline and intro adopted the moral frame applied by the Deputy Prime Minister.

The lead paragraph draws on the Anderson material but conflates his comments and those of his colleague into the single entity of ‘the federal government’. The following paragraphs present the Employment Services Minister as the source of consequences and the rationale for them:

Signalling a crackdown, [Brough] said research showed one in six registered job seekers, or 16 per cent, fitted the bill of a dole bludger.

AAP then reproduced two paragraphs of direct quotes from Brough’s media release – ‘These people are content [and] deserve to be labelled dole bludgers’ – and then inserted a two-paragraph summary of Anderson’s comments, followed by a return to Brough:

Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson also weighed into the issue and denied the government was trying to deflect attention from the furore over the Budget crackdown on disability pensions.

“It is just not right to expect the community to support you if you’re fully capable of working but you’re deliberately shirking work. That’s not the Australian way,” he said.

Mr Brough said the government would enforce new rules making all job seekers aged 18 to 49 take part in work-for-dole programs after six months on benefits.

He cited examples from the research to back his claims for a crackdown.

In these four paragraphs, AAP positions Anderson - in what van Dijk (1988, p 81) calls an opinion-controlled lexical choice – ‘weighed into the issue’ – as having offered his opinion; the position is one of commentary, albeit supplied by a member of the same, official source. Brough, in contrast, is a source of detailed information about the consequences for the dole cruisers of their own behaviour, with government plans to ‘enforce new rules’. These rules provided for an extension of the Work-for-the-dole scheme to people aged up to 49 and had been announced in the Federal Budget a week before Brough’s dole cruiser announcement. As has been seen elsewhere, the Minister’s original media release – and the first exclusive reports in the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* – contained no reference to these new rules.

This third AAP report – 17 paragraphs in total – also contained criticism of the Government’s position. The final four paragraphs of the report – in terms of top down organization, the least memorable or privileged parts – were given to two Opposition MPs:

Opposition family and community services spokesman Wayne Swan said the planned crackdown was ‘an admission of failure from the Howard government that they are incapable of running a fair and compassionate system.

Mr Swan also questioned the validity of the survey, saying the findings needed to be tabled in parliament.

Opposition employment services spokesman David Cox said the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the Job Network found disadvantaged job seekers were being parked in intensive assistance.

They were given only the pretence of help by Job Network providers who instead concentrated on getting lucrative payments by helping the job ready.

Swan's critique is based in part on an expression of welfare discourse that contains suppositions relating to behaviour, not on the part of welfare recipients but of welfare policy makers. As a member of the Opposition, Swan aspires to become one of the policy makers and is engaged in what is effectively a generic argument about which political party can lay claim to the virtues of fairness and compassion. These virtues, of course, operate in tandem with other, administrative virtues such that either party in power will claim to be 'tough but fair'.

Notably, the AAP report also attributed to Swan a question about the basis of the Government's dole cruiser claims and a suggestion that this should be subject to scrutiny by the Parliament. AAP presents this paramount issue – the validity of the research – as something of an afterthought. Because Swan 'also questioned', the report directs emphasis away from the ideas presented by him. Here, a political interpretation of the crackdown is given precedence, and therefore at least local significance in the story hierarchy, over questions about the truthfulness of the reasons for that crackdown.

The final two paragraphs of the report attribute to Swan's colleague detailed information that seeks to rebut or at least question the Government's version of the nature of some unemployed people. Cox suggests an alternative version based on evidence provided by an official inquiry. In this version, some job seekers are 'disadvantaged' and as a result

are subjected to a form of discrimination. Implicit in the Cox version is the notion that the individual characteristics of these job seekers are not relevant to their plight; they are not to blame. Once again, the AAP report relegates this detailed argument to the far background of the report, implicitly reducing the significance of this aspect of the cruiser story.

To this point, consideration of the AAP sequence of dole cruiser reports shows that that they form part of a binary political discourse in which the Government and Opposition express all the cruiser dialogue, with the former proposing an argument and the latter responding. Thus far, no other voice is being heard in the debate.

This situation changed with the publication of a third newspaper version of the cruiser discourse. That report is considered in the following section.

10.5 ‘Welfare cheats’ or ‘government ploy’

People in Melbourne were able to read about the cruisers on the same day that the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* broke the story in their home cities. This was because Melbourne’s MX newspaper published a version of the cruiser story based in part on AAP copy. The report appeared to be drawn from the first of the AAP sequence of reports identified above. The headline: ‘Welfare cheats in strife’ incorrectly identified the dole cruisers as comprising only those people who manipulate, abuse or defraud the welfare system. The MX intro reported:

The federal government is planning a crackdown on so-called dole bludgers after research found 16 per cent of dole recipients enjoyed the welfare lifestyle and had no intention of genuinely seeking work (MX, 2002, p 5)

This lead paragraph was almost identical to the AAP version but contained the additional prefixing term ‘so-called’ ahead of the label ‘dole bludgers’. Thus the unmitigated welfare cheats of the headline are qualified as being somebody else’s dole bludgers in the lead.

The second paragraph of the 11-par MX report provided information that followed the AAP version and the third paragraph reproduced quotes from the media release:

Employment Services Minister Mal Brough said research proved there was a large group of “non performers” content to stay on the dole, with up to one in six registered job seekers not really looking for work.

“These people are content to seek a benefit from the Australian taxpayer and feel that work would have a negative impact on their quality of life and free time,” Brough said. “They give genuine job seekers a bad name and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers.” (MX, 2002, p 5)

The next two succeeding paragraphs contained unsourced information about what the MX report called the eight categories of job seekers and repeated the quantitative description of the cruisers as accounting for ‘about 16 per cent of the total’. Paragraph six represented the last in the report to feature information provided by the government:

Brough said this was the first genuine research as opposed to anecdotal evidence to confirm “the existence of a substantial body of non-performers in Australia (MX, 2002, p 5)

The second half of the MX story – from paragraphs seven to 11 – introduced a critical response from a national community services advocate who was positioned in the text as a critic not of the research but of what he depicted as a recurrent political strategy:

But Australian Council of Social Services (sic) president Andrew McCallum said the research was another government ploy to tarnish the image of welfare recipients.

“It concerns me that it comes on the heels of the attack on the disability pension,” McCallum said.

“There seems to be a national agenda to attack anyone receiving benefits that there is a deserving and undeserving poor out there.”

McCallum said the government had to justify its budget promise to step up requirements for Australians on work-for-the-dole programs.

“That money could have been better spent on job training programs,” he said. “Job creation is what the government should be on about, not punishing victims of a jobless society.” (MX, 2002, p 5)

Among the three newspaper versions of the cruiser reporting considered to this point, the MX report contained the first detailed critique of the government statement. However, like the reference in the *Courier Mail* report to those welfare groups who raised the notion of government demonising the unemployed, the ACOSS president’s criticisms belonged to a part of the welfare discourse that involved attribution of blame based on perceived motivations. Criticism is directed not at the specific claims made by the government but is based on the proposition that the government has an ongoing punitive stance towards welfare recipients. In this context it may be suggested that McCallum’s use of words like ‘tarnish’, ‘attack’ and ‘punishing’ reflect a welfare sector response to

the military-style nomenclature of the government's welfare discourse. To some extent, both sides are engaged in attacking each other, rather than scrutinising the substantive issues.

Another expression of this polarised – or even pugilistic – discourse of politics and welfare was included in the last of the sequence of AAP cruiser reports produced on 20 May 2002.

10.6 'Blaming the victim syndrome'

As we have seen, the first three of the four consecutive AAP reports were produced in Canberra and Sydney. The fourth in the series – an eight-paragraph story produced in the home city of the *Courier Mail* – was also the first to frame criticism of the government position as the main topic of the story:

Government is blaming jobless victims, says welfare group

BRISBANE, May 20 AAP – The federal government was blaming the victim in its push to crackdown on supposed dole bludgers, a social welfare group said today.

The director of Uniting Care Queensland's Centre for Social Justice, Noel Preston, said the government was making a "miserable" attempt to cast blame on people who could not find work.

"Blaming the victim syndrome has a very undesirable social effect of depressing those who are already at the bottom of the pile."

The Queensland critic operates within a welfare and public policy discourse based in part on implied claims on relevant expertise and moral authority, for he represents both a

church and a specialist social justice arm of that body. In its lead, AAP selected a title for the critic from a secular lexicon – ‘a social welfare group’ – rather than pointing immediately to the religious affiliation of that body.

The Uniting Care official Noel Preston invokes a script within the welfare discourse that runs counter to those of the government and its ideological supporters. In this script, individuals are cast as victims and the government as an agent drawing on its own recurring patterns of behaviour to unfairly and erroneously attack its targets. In Preston’s script unemployed people are suffering as individuals – ‘self-doubt and social exclusion’ – within a social hierarchy that relegates them to the lowest level.

The middle section of the report – the fourth and fifth paragraphs – provided the rationale for Preston’s criticisms. These paragraphs noted that Brough had ‘said today’ that research had ‘proven the existence’ of [the dole cruisers]. The remaining paragraphs were devoted to the critic:

But Dr Preston said the planned government crackdown on ‘dole cruisers’ was designed to reinforce community attitudes to enable them to ‘slash and cut’ welfare budgets ...[and]

Even if we accept the 16 per cent figure, the impact of this whole story and this whole approach will help fuel the self-doubt and social exclusion of the rest of the 84 per cent without jobs.

The welfare advocate thus expresses scepticism about the quantification of the cruisers and argues that true or not, the government’s approach will have adverse consequences for the majority of the unemployed.

Through AAP, Preston's critique is expected to have been available to newspapers that published their first versions of the cruiser story on 21 May 2002. Analysis of this part of the sample is presented below.

10.7 'Happy jobless targeted'

At least some of the AAP material produced on 20 May was reproduced or incorporated with other material by various newspapers on 21 May. On the same day the government issued a second media release relating to the methodology and findings of the cruiser research. The timing of the release meant that it appeared after publication of the newspaper reports so its contents will be considered later in the thesis.

Headlines produced by the papers on the 21st included:

Crackdown on 'dole Bludgers' (*Illawarra Mercury*, p 2)

One in six a dole bludger (*The Adelaide Advertiser*, p 11)

Happy jobless targeted (*The Cairns Post*, p 7)

Dole bludgers back in gun (*Hobart Mercury*, p 2)

In Wollongong, the *Illawarra Mercury* gave the story 10 paragraphs. In Hobart, it got seven. The Advertiser found room for four and *The Cairns Post* devoted three paragraphs to the story. The *Illawarra Mercury* omitted any criticism of the cruiser crackdown, while the Hobart, Adelaide and Cairns papers all ran the same single AAP-supplied paragraph at the end of their reports, quoting Federal Opposition family and community

services spokesman Wayne Swan. He said the planned crackdown was ‘(A)n admission of failure from the Howard Government that they are incapable of running a fair and compassionate welfare system’.

The four newspapers’ treatment of the story tended towards acceptance of the underlying ideological premises and of a status quo in which bludgers and crackdowns are presented as an unremarkable and recurring feature of the welfare system. In this context, the provision of the Swan criticism does not disturb the status quo but may be interpreted as another feature of it. The critique is made by a politician of other politicians and also fits into the journalistic method of simplification. The government is proposing potentially punitive action against 100,000 citizens but the newspapers need few words to describe it and even fewer to report criticism of it.

The *West Australian* edition of May 21 ran a longer version than those described above and placed it on page three, with a Canberra dateline, the by-line Melissa Stevens, and the headline:

Dole queues the target

and a sub head:

Government says one in six welfare recipients are just bludgers

The second headline is linked causally to its much shorter predecessor; the sub-head provides the rationale for the proposed action. In its lexical choices, this pair of headlines creates a colloquial collective image of the unemployed that may be read variously as a

reference to their passivity – those who wait in queues – or to their purpose in lining up to seek a government handout. Additionally, the sub headline emphasises the force of the government’s declaration about them, for in the word ‘just’, the headline suggests that one sixth of jobless people truly, really are bludgers.

Unlike the cruiser reportage considered to this point, the *West Australian*’s coverage featured two critics of the government, one from the federal opposition and one from the WA Council of Social Service. The intro and second paragraph, however, established the cruiser research as valid:

The Federal Government is cracking down on dole bludgers after research found one in six welfare recipients enjoyed the unemployed lifestyle and had no intention of getting a job.

Employment Services Minister Mal Brough said Department of Employment and Workplace Relations research showed up to 16 per cent of job seekers were not looking for work. (Stevens, 2002, p 3)

In line with other versions, this report invoked the typical language of welfare punishment – the crackdown – and contained presuppositions: that dole bludgers are a continuously present social type and that there is a generic unemployed lifestyle. The third and fourth paragraphs reproduced direct quotes of the Minister as presented in his media release:

These people are content to collect...and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers (Brough, 2002, p 1)

After quoting Brough, *The West Australian* provided its readers with information about the methodology that had produced the cruiser findings. Among the newspapers in the thesis sample, *The West Australian* was one of only two that identified the researchers:

The department commissioned Colmar Brunton Social Research to do research on the attitudes of unemployed Newstart recipients towards work and their search for work. It also identified eight categories of work seekers – ranging from highly motivated “drivers”, who were open to all job opportunities, to “withdrawn” job seekers, who were not motivated to look for work, often because of a medical or psychological condition.

The research found “cruising” job seekers were relaxed about being unemployed, did not want to work in a full-time or permanent job and were not looking for work (Stevens, 2002, p 3)

In its reporting of the methodology and detailing of aspects of a spectrum of job seekers’ purported motivations, the newspaper departed from the Brough scheme involving an almost complete focus on the dole cruisers. Simultaneously, *The West Australian* provided an ontological basis for the motivational catalogue that included the cruisers, by selecting the word ‘identified’ as the critical verb descriptor to explain the origin of the octadic scheme produced by Colmar Brunton. This lexical choice suggests that the dole cruisers could be found in a form of pre-existing identity parade, rather than, for example, being brought into existence as an invention of social marketers. In this, the newspaper implicitly accepts the Government’s argument that the presence of the dole cruisers was never in doubt.

Not until paragraph seven of a 16-par story does the paper tell its readers that according to Brough, the research is unique and has proved the existence of numerous non-performers. Again, as with other reports, the *West Australian* demonstrates an

ideological commitment to the underlying premises of the cruiser claims. The news here is not so much about an alleged proof or truth. It is that the government is doing what it has done before in seeking to discipline the unemployed in the interests of the majority community. As van Dijk (1988, p 120) asserts, ‘complete novelty is by definition incomprehensible’ but in the scheme of The *West Australian*’s report, the concept of unprecedented and unique knowledge is of only minor interest, so much so that its representation is contextualised only in terms of consequences:

Mr Brough said there had always been anecdotal evidence about the existence of the “cruisers” but this was the first genuine research which confirmed the existence of a substantial body of non-performers.

He warned the Government would be getting tough on them. (Stevens, 2002, p 3)

Criticism of the government statement appears at paragraph 11 – two thirds of the way into the report – in the form of statements by the government’s direct political opponents and local welfare advocates:

Opposition employment services spokesman David Cox accused Mr Brough of trying to divert attention from the failure of the Government’s Job Network system to help disadvantaged long-term unemployed.

“There are currently seven job seekers for each vacancy,” Mr Cox said.

“The Government’s own Budget is forecasting only a minimal fall in unemployment over the next year and the Government wants to put more pressure on the Job Network by transferring people who are on disability support pensions on to Newstart.”

WA Council of Social Service executive director Shawn Boyle accused the Government of contributing to the stigmatising and stereotyping of the unemployed.

“We know there are a lot of discouraged job seekers,” he said. “It’s an unfair spin to put on it.

“It’s not the absence of a work ethic amongst the unemployed that’s creating unemployment, it’s the lack of jobs.” (Stevens, 2002, p 3)

The presence of this criticism only in the last third of the story indicates that in what van Dijk (1988, p 142) refers to as the ‘top-to-bottom relevance hierarchy’, the government statement is dominant and these critical responses are relegated to a relatively inferior position. The *West Australian* has not used the option of drawing the reader’s attention to the critics by inserting an initial reference to them in either the sub head or lead paragraphs of the story. Instead, the way the report summarises and organises the information provided by Brough and his critics suggests that the journalists responsible for production of the text share a script – or frame – about unemployment and some unemployed people that the former is promoting. As noted previously, scripts are held to represent people’s stereotypical and consensual knowledge of actions, events and episodes in social life (van Dijk, 1988, p 102). Here, the dominant script is about the well known prevalence of dole bludgers and the equally well known propensity of the government to criticise and discipline them. Other scripts – including those that see opposition politicians opposing, and welfare advocates invoking a pro-welfare discourse – are also valid but of lesser relevance or significance in the scheme of the dole cruiser story.

This particular relevance hierarchy is, arguably, reinforced at the morphological level. The minister’s speech actions are described with the verbs ‘said’ and ‘warned’. In contrast, the first references to each of Brough’s critics employ another form – ‘accused’. This notion – of laying a charge or blaming – carries with it the implicit possibility of wrongness; the charge may not stick, the blaming may be groundless. In terms of a

metaphorical terrain of welfare discourse, the newspaper thus presents Brough as commanding the heights while his opponents trudge through the foothills.

The dole cruiser story also appeared in four other newspapers in the sample identified for this thesis. The national business daily *Australian Financial Review* appeared to demonstrate its view of the relative newsworthiness of the story by placing it second last among eight single paragraph briefs in a column on page nine of its May 21 edition. Briefs about ALP/union infighting, the drought, a Victorian shopping centre tender scandal and national television ratings were among those given more prominence.

The Review's sister paper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, also appeared to regard the story as of minor significance. Although it placed the report on page 2, it gave the story a single paragraph in a column of briefs:

People enjoying life on the dole and not looking for a job were immoral and un-Australian, the Federal Government said yesterday. Signalling a crackdown, the Employment Services Minister, Mal Brough, said research showed that one in six registered job seekers, or 100,000 people, "deserve to be labelled dole bludgers".

The Herald's report duplicated the first sentence of the third in the sequence of AAP reports; it also used the second sentence from that report but made one change so that where AAP quoted Brough as saying some people 'fitted the bill of a dole bludger', the newspaper used the words attributed to the Minister from his own media release.

Along with other reports, the *SMH* also inserted the large round number of dole cruisers that did not feature in Brough's statement.

10.8 A follow-up report

On 21 May, the *Courier Mail* published a second cruiser report. The *Courier Mail* was one of only two papers in my sample to follow its initial report with another on the next day. The paper did not, however, switch the main focus of its reporting away from its government sources. The headline and initial six paragraphs of the 14-paragraph report outlined what van Dijk describes as the macroproposition or main topic of the text – that the dole cruisers have breached a unique moral code:

Anderson hits ‘un-Australian’ work shirkers

Neglecting to look for work while accepting the dole was “not the Australian way” Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson said yesterday.

Mr Anderson made the comment in support of a Federal Government crackdown on more than 100,000 people identified as bludgers in a national survey.

The survey, detailed in The *Courier Mail* yesterday, found 16 per cent of unemployed people did not want work and were happy to be unemployed. At the other end of the scale 16 per cent were highly-motivated and open to all job opportunities.

Mr Anderson said most Australians would be angered to know unemployed people were accepting the dole but not looking for work and the Government had an obligation to respond to the survey.

“Moral standards and decency do matter,” he said.

“It is just not right to expect the community to support you if you’re fully capable of working but you’re deliberately shirking work. That’s not the Australian way. (Parnell, 2002, p 2)

In this, the *Courier Mail*’s second presentation of the story, the newspaper again provides its primary source with the dominant position. The government’s critics – the local

welfare advocate and a national political figure – are positioned in the lower rungs of a relevance hierarchy, based on a contrary view, from paragraphs seven to 11:

But director of Uniting Care Queensland's Centre for Social Justice, Noel Preston, said the Government was being "miserable" in continuing to blame the victim for a lack of jobs.

"Blaming-the-victim syndrome has a very undesirable social effect of depressing those who are already at the bottom of the pile," Dr Preston said.

Opposition community services spokesman Wayne Swan said Labor would not support rorting of the welfare system, and the Government had used the "smokescreen" survey to divert attention from disability pension cuts.

Mr Swan last week revealed the Government had conducted research which found people wanted more help for those with disabilities, not cuts to their pensions.

"The Government has no vision for the future of the welfare system. It simply has a plan for finding fault and scapegoating individuals and branding all individuals as rorters because it can't sell its Government proposals," Mr Swan said.

In line with van Dijk's explication of news schemata (1988, pp 51-53), the *Courier Mail* provides its readers with some background information – in the form of a recent event – to explain the Swan reference to disability pension cuts. Once provided with information about popular opinion about disability support, readers can make judgements about Swan's smokescreen argument.

The last word, however, is not Swan's. The newspaper gives that to the government in what is in effect a right of reply:

Mr Anderson described claims of a deliberate diversionary tactic as "an absolute load of nonsense".

"I am all for supporting people in need and always will be, but it has to be properly targeted, it has to be sustainable and it's time we got a little integrity in the debate about the disability services pension," he said.

The survey was released by Employment Services Minister Mal Brough yesterday.

With the reference to integrity, this version of the cruiser story ends where it began, in the context of primary source assertions founded on notions of virtuous thought and action.

As noted previously, publication of the cruiser reportage on 21 May 2002 was followed by the release of a second media statement by Minister Brough. This statement is considered in the next section.

10.9 ‘Doubt’ about the data

On 21 May the government issued a statement with the title: ‘Brough Releases First Report on Job Seekers’ Attitudes’. This document notified the media about the immediate availability of ‘the first of two reports on the attitudinal segmentation of job seekers in Australia.’ In this second release was information absent from its predecessor:

Building on New Zealand research into the attitudinal segmentation of job seekers, this report details the findings of in-depth qualitative research of a sample of 52 job seekers used to develop an Australian model, comprising eight attitudinal segments.

The findings formed the basis for a range of attitudinal statements that underpinned the survey of a representative sample of 3,500 job seekers which identified the size of each of the attitudinal segments. The detailed quantitative findings of this survey will be released within the week. (Brough, 2002b, p 1)

So, the researchers interviewed 52 unemployed people. Some of them made statements the researchers interpreted as indicating the respondents’ satisfaction with unemployment as a way of life. This information was included in another survey of 3,500 jobless people

and they were asked to respond to the information in the form of ‘attitudinal statements’. The results of the second, larger survey were interpreted as showing that as many as one in six – or about 16 per cent – of all jobless people could be categorised as dole cruisers. Although this contextual information was absent from the original media release, it can be assumed that a government source provided the information about a survey of 3000 unemployed people that was reported, as noted previously, by the *Daily Telegraph* and *Courier Mail*. The reason for the discrepancy between that figure and the 3500 of the second news release is unclear but may be linked to the ministerial briefings analysed previously. As noted in section 7.3, the briefing material included advice that the research had involved a survey of ‘some 3000’ jobseekers in 2001.

As noted, the Government offered the media this information about the qualitative and quantitative basis of the research and a report of qualitative findings a day after many newspapers had published stories based on the first media release.

None of the newspapers in the thesis sample – or any other media that I am aware of – subsequently reported on any of the contents of the research report that the Minister released on 21 May 2002.

Around the time of the appearance of the second media release, AAP produced and disseminated another report focusing on criticism of the government’s claims. This source of criticism was a senior welfare advocate who appeared on television.

SYDNEY, May 21 AAP – Federal government figures showing 16 per cent of dole recipients were bludgers taking taxpayer-funded holidays were incorrect, the head of a peak welfare body said today.

Australian Council of Social Services [sic] (ACOSS) president Andrew McCallum said he doubted the number of insincere job seekers was as high as 16 per cent, and he was dubious about the methodology used in the government’s research.

‘I’m not sure that that figure is correct. The minister hasn’t sent out the full report yet so we don’t really know what the methodology was,’ he told the Seven network today.

‘The type of questions one person said was asked was ‘would you rather be with your friends or look for a job and a scale of one to 10.

It’s a bit like asking me if I want to be up at 6:30 this morning or would I rather lie in bed.’

The lead paragraph provides a series of transformations of the dole cruiser material as originally presented in the first Brough media release. The research is described as ‘government figures’ and the cruisers are represented in a form that both summarises and simplifies their typology by selecting Brough’s use of the illicit holiday image, linked – through the phrase ‘taxpayer-funded’ – to the implicit presence of working, tax-paying, moral Australians.

Notably, the intro attributes to Brough’s critic an unequivocal position that is not present elsewhere in the report. The absolute statement that the cruiser figures ‘were incorrect’ is followed by two equivocal expressions – ‘he doubted’ and ‘I’m not sure’. Given that the lead actor in the report, ACOSS president Andrew McCallum, is also quoted as providing a specific basis for his doubt – that the methodology is unknown – it is less rather than more likely that he would have expressed the unequivocal rejection of the figures that AAP reports in its intro. The basis for the statement attributed to McCallum in the lead paragraph is thus unclear.

McCallum's comments were followed in the AAP report by six paragraphs of information based on the government's dole cruiser announcement and featuring quotes from Brough, who appeared on the same Seven network program on the morning of 21 May:

(We found) 16 per cent are drivers and would do anything to get a job, and 16 per cent are at the other end of the scale and are quite happy to take a taxpayer-funded holiday, and there are those in between that genuinely need help," he told the program. (AAP, 2002e)

AAP's report clearly relies in part on information presented by another media outlet. It may be for this reason that the propositions presented by the two opposing positions – that of welfare advocate and government minister – do not converge. It is not clear whether Brough and McCallum appeared together or separately on the TV program; Brough's quoted comments certainly do not address McCallum's criticism but simply repeat the argument he had outlined previously.

In summary, the sequence of AAP reports over two days provided the news agency's media clients with material about the dole cruiser story based on statements by the main political protagonist and a senior government colleague, and criticism expressed by two Opposition politicians and by two welfare advocates.

The critics invoked elements of a rhetorical welfare discourse in which conservative governments are accused of lacking compassion, but also raised specific questions about the validity and merit of the research underpinning the government's claims.

In contrast, one small regional newspaper in Queensland used a combination of AAP copy and quoted commentary by a local representative of unemployed people and a local Federal Government MP in its reporting. The *Townsville Bulletin* used a succinct headline drawn from the standard media vernacular on welfare reporting:

Crackdown on dole bludgers

Given the absence of any attempt to convey the novel qualities of the dole cruiser story, the headline can be read as containing a presupposition that effectively prefixes the description of action and object. That is, this is really *one more* crackdown on dole bludgers.

Beneath its headline The Bulletin published unchanged the AAP lead paragraph from what I have assumed was the initial, Canberra-dated story in the AAP sequence of cruiser reports:

“The Federal Government is planning a crackdown on dole bludgers after research found 16 per cent of dole recipients enjoyed the welfare lifestyle and had no intention of genuinely seeking work. (AAPa, in *Townsville Bulletin*, 2002, p 3)

In reproducing the AAP lead paragraph, The Bulletin also adopts the ideological suppositions outlined previously; dole bludgers are a continuous presence in the welfare system and community and their mode of existence may be characterised generically, and

generally, as a welfare or unemployed 'lifestyle', with that noun connoting the exercise of choice by an individual or group.

That said, the newspaper then provides in its second paragraph a stark counter to the ideological stance of the intro:

But convenor of the Unemployed Workers Group in Townsville, Frank Costanzo, said the only bludgers were John Howard and the federal Coalition.

This government is made of up millionaires who are just sponging off the taxpayers," Mr Costanzo said. He said he would take the Employment Services Department's figures "with a pinch of salt" and that they were only being publicised to divert attention away from the inadequacies and arrogance of the Government. (*Townsville Bulletin*, 2002, p3)

Significantly, the newspaper uses some reporting techniques not apparent in other cruiser media reports analysed to this point in the thesis. First, the paper adopts a local stance by seeking comment from a community representative; second, it also seeks that comment from a person who purports to represent the interests of those who are being publicly castigated by two Federal ministers. Although, as we have seen, AAP reported the critical commentary of a national welfare advocate, that material was produced on the morning of 21 May, too late to be covered in the newspaper reports published that day and included in my sample.

After reporting Costanzo's political invective – and an associated scepticism based, it appears, on ideological grounds – the Bulletin provided background to the cruiser story in the form of four paragraphs either reproduced from the AAP Canberra copy, or paraphrasing that content. All four paragraphs contained information about the cruisers

that was directly or indirectly attributed to the Minister, Mal Brough. The last in this sequence of paragraphs contained a judgemental statement by Brough, followed by the appearance in the Bulletin report of another local actor appearing in a support role. Brough was quoted thus:

“They give genuine job seekers a bad name and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers.”

Member for Herbert Peter Lindsay agreed with Mr Brough, saying those people were taking that amount of money away from people who need that support.

Mr Lindsay said he would stand by the Minister and do what he could to identify those people.

“I will do whatever I can not to allow people who aren’t genuinely looking for work to take advantage of the Australian taxpayer,” he said. (*Townsville Bulletin*, 2002, p 3)

To this point, my analysis of the cruiser reporting concerns stories published on 20 and 21 May 2002 by 11 newspapers – the *Daily Telegraph*, *Courier Mail*, MX in Melbourne, *Illawarra Mercury*, *Hobart Mercury*, *Adelaide Advertiser*, *Cairns Post*, *West Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Australian Financial Review* and the *Townsville Bulletin*.

Four of these newspapers reported no criticism of the dole cruiser claims. Of those six papers that did report criticism, three used the same single paragraph supplied by AAP and featuring commentary by a senior Federal Opposition figure; one newspaper published AAP material quoting a senior welfare advocate; one paper (*Courier Mail*) published a follow-up report that included a critique by a state-based welfare advocate; and one paper published commentary by a representative of unemployed people.

However, reporting of the criticism was characterised by material that largely did not deviate from a discourse founded on political and moral frames. Questions about the methodology and validity of the claims about the dole cruisers were absent from the material presented to readers of the story.

The next section will focus on the story as reported by the remaining four newspapers in the sample and, in particular, the extent to which they deviated from the political and moral framing of the cruiser story.

10.10 'Cynical and unfair'

Headlines, as van Dijk suggests, may function to express and signal a topic – or even the main topic – of a newspaper report. Additionally, however, these first few words that are presented in a distinctly different format to the body text of a story, also act as what van Dijk sees as a 'major control instance' on a reader's 'further interpretation' of the rest of the story (1988, p 34). The argument is that people start to guess at the meaning before they have interpreted an entire text, in line with psychology's notion of top-down processing of information. Against this background, it may be observed that headlines that rely on the lexical register of welfare cheats, bludgers and crackdowns may be more likely to invite or induce what Putnis has called anti-welfarism in the responses of some readers. It is equally possible, of course, that such headlines may stimulate strong pro-welfare or sympathetic responses in other readers.

Either way, the example of the cruiser headline published by *The Age* indicates that the choice of even a single word may be highly instructive in relation to analysis of a newspaper's ideological stance.

On 21 May 2002, *The Age* published a report on page three under the by-line Annabel Crabb and a Canberra dateline. The headline provided a succinct subject-object summary of the story and used a verb from outside the 'crackdown' register of political welfare discourse to do so:

Minister Pursues Dole 'Cruisers'

The absence in the headline of the crackdown lexical genre contributes to its operation as a descriptive rather than declarative or judgemental component of the story. This stance continues in the lead paragraph because it does not conform to Brough's singular focus on dole cruisers but reports more broadly on a much larger group of jobless people characterised by attitude:

More than half of Australia's job seekers are "unmotivated" and one in six enjoys being on the dole, according to a report circulated by federal Employment Services minister Mal Brough, (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

This paragraph establishes a selective summary of the minister's report. The text attributes two propositions – about motivation and enjoyment – to the government source but indicates through the use of the quotation marks that only one of the pair may be seen as being a direct invention of the source. Although, as we will see below, *The Age* was given access to the Government's report, it is not clear why the newspaper chose to draw attention to the word 'unmotivated' and not, at least to the same degree, to the word 'enjoys', given that Brough used the latter in the very first paragraph of his media statement. Again, what may be in operation is a subtle example of van Dijk's opinion-controlled lexical choices (1988, p 81). The choice exercised here is that of *The Age*, and it may represent an expression of sceptical independence towards the paper's primary source. In effect, the paper may be saying that the finding about the unmotivated majority is more relevant and worthy of attention than that about the cruising minority.

Through the selection of the verb ‘circulated’ the newspaper also seeks to inform its readers that the government has not released its report widely but on a narrow or selective basis.

In the second paragraph, consequences of action are outlined and linked to a competing version of the motivational and political contexts of the government’s statement. The paragraph also establishes a dramatic element of tension through the selection of comparatively power-laden verbs, associated respectively with the Minister and his ideological and policy opponents:

Mr Brough yesterday vowed to flush out people “holidaying” on benefits, but was accused by welfare groups of waging a cynical and unfair campaign against the unemployed. (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

In relation to Brough, the foreshadowed action is expressed in the form of the ‘vow’ with its somewhat archaic notions of powerful intent and sacred duty; the action itself – the flushing out – connotes a form of public cleansing in line with the government’s long standing and self proclaimed duty to maintain the integrity of the social security system. Flushing out may also be read, however, in a militaristic context, where a tactic of soldiers may be to expose and conquer enemies who are concealed from immediate view. These meaning-laden verbs are in a deep semantic sense counterbalanced by those attributed to the welfare groups who are the source not only of implicit criticism but a direct imputation of guilty behaviour on the part of the Minister. The welfare groups do not argue, assert or claim – they ‘accuse’, and in doing so provide a personalised focus on Brough that attributes personal motives founded on negativity. In addition, the welfare

groups are reported as drawing on another element of the militaristic/welfare lexicon, for they accuse Brough of ‘waging’ his campaign, with the available inference being that he is making war on the victimised unemployed and doing so without just or righteous cause.

Each of these pairs of verbs appear to be a product of the newspaper, rather than the sources with which they are associated, because Brough’s media release and public statements did not include any ‘vow to flush out’ and the available AAP copy and other newspaper sources do not contain similar references to accusations by welfare groups. (I have noted previously that the same verb – accused – was used twice in *The West Australian*’s dole cruiser report.) However, irrespective of the source of production of these elements of *The Age* report, use of the words has the effect of replicating the prevailing form of political discourse, where rhetorical attack and counterattack are primary elements. In this way, the newspaper presents a drama of conflict between protagonists. Arguably, the people most affected by the conflict – the unemployed – are in rhetorical and semantic terms pushed to the sidelines of the story to passively await their fate.

The Age also informed its readers that the report that provided the basis for the government’s claims had not been released in full. However:

According to a copy seen by *The Age* the [report] judged that 43 per cent [of the unemployed] were ‘motivated’ to find a job, but 57 per cent were confused, disheartened, had given up or were not interested in finding a job because it did not suit their lives. (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

Here the newspaper employs a strategy of bypassing the rhetoric of the Brough news release, with its singular focus on just one of the eight segments of the jobless. Further, the paper's use of the verb 'judged' provides more rhetorical distance from any implicit endorsement of the veracity of the report. It also makes another verb selection to emphasise Brough's selective focus on one of those eight segments:

Mr Brough yesterday seized on the finding that 16 per cent of job seekers – the equal biggest sub-group – were “cruisers” who were happy to be unemployed and who were not interested in finding fulltime work. (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

Paragraph nine of *The Age* report asserts a political context for the story by referring to the government's proposed intensification of its mutual obligation policy:

It is believed Mr Brough's campaign is an attempt to win public favour for the new stricter requirements. (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

This belief is not attributed to anyone. Reasons for holding such a belief are also not canvassed.

In its next paragraph *The Age* introduces ACOSS president Andrew McCallum. He is reported as saying that Brough's remarks (about dole cruisers) continue a 'pattern'. The quotation marks indicate that McCallum has used the word pattern. The pattern is one established, McCallum says, by disability benefit cuts in a federal Budget that preceded the cruiser release by a week. McCallum also provides a numerical counterweight to the government's quantum of dole bludgers:

“This report doesn’t change the fact that in Australia there are 86,000 vacancies and 630,000 people looking for work,” he said. (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

The Age report then provides more contextual information about the unemployment research. The paper says the research was commissioned by Brough and was based on interviews with 60 people and polling of another 3,500 jobless people. McCallum is reintroduced as criticising the research methodology:

Mr McCallum said some of the questions, such as ‘You don’t mind being unemployed because it gives you time to spend with your family and friends. Agree/Disagree’, amounted to ‘push-polling’ the unemployed. (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

The concept of push polling is not defined; the newspaper therefore assumes an appropriate level of comprehension on the part of its readers.

The paragraphs featuring McCallum’s criticism are followed by one presenting criticism from the Opposition’s family and community services spokesman Wayne Swan who:

[S]aid the government had “rushed out” the report. He described it as deeply flawed and aimed at counteracting the bad publicity the government was attracting over changes to the disability pension. (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

Once again, media reporting of criticism of the dole cruiser material is cast primarily in a context that attributes political motives to the government, rather than focusing on the validity of the material itself.

The single Swan paragraph preceded a section of the story that listed what a sub headline called ‘Eight kinds of unemployed’, together with the percentages attributed to each category:

DRIVER Highly motivated, open to any job: 16 per cent

STRUGGLER Motivated but unconfident: 8 per cent

DRIFTER Wants a job, not sure what kind: 13 per cent

DISEMPOWERED Wants to work but thinks there’s no chance: 15 per cent

SELECTIVE Wants one particular kind of job: 7 per cent

DEPENDENT Wants a job, but not just any job: 12 per cent

CRUISER Likes being unemployed, doesn’t want work: 16 per cent

WITHDRAWN Not motivated, doesn’t think he/she is capable of work: 13 per cent

SOURCE: EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
(Crabb, 2002, p 3)

Below the list of attitudinal categories, *The Age* provided its readers with what another sub head called ‘Views from the queue’. These views appear to be the equivalent of the vignettes supplied to the media by Brough but are not sourced to the government. Indeed, they appear to have been obtained independently by the newspaper. *The Age* provides three ‘views’. It may be inferred that the names published are those of actual unemployed people. This contrasts with the dole cruiser identities portrayed in the Brough release, with their fictional first names and absent family names:

Jess Baullo – Aged 20 and unemployed for two years. Completed courses in hospitality and hairdressing. “There are not many jobs around. People are trying. I come to the Centrelink for help and to use the services.”

Dave Grant – A carpenter. Unemployed since breaking his neck in a car accident last year: “It’s depressing, very depressing, without a job. I’m really frustrated because I can’t (find) work.”

Craig Hill – Unemployed plasterer and labourer. “I’ve been unemployed just the past couple of weeks and I already find it frustrating. There’s really not a great deal out there and there’s so much competition.” (Crabb, 2002, p 3)

In reporting the reactions of these people, *The Age* makes no explicit comment or linkage to the Brough claims or the politico-welfare discourse underway in relation to the dole cruisers. However the three views imply a different and contrasting set of experiences to those portrayed – and explicitly condemned – by Brough. Among these countervailing experiences are circumstances of misfortune that affect people, as well as competition between them for limited opportunities in the labour market.

Another version of the cruiser story appeared in the *Canberra Times*, with the by-line Emma Macdonald. On May 21 the newspaper ran the story on page one with the headline:

Dole bludgers, your time is up: Brough

Although the headline provides both attribution and a summarising description of the overall topic of the story – the government is warning some unemployed people of impending action against them – the lead paragraph diverges from the headline stance by emphasising the reactions of some sources to the government’s statements:

Labor and community groups reacted with anger yesterday to a claim by Employment Services Minister Mal Brough that 16 per cent of people on the dole want to stay unemployed. (Macdonald, 2002, p 1)

Given the period of elapsed time between Brough's initial, selective release of the dole cruiser statement and publication of the *Canberra Times* version – a full day after the initial *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* cruiser reports – it is perhaps not surprising that the report should focus not on the government's claims but on subsequent critical statements about those claims. However, in the 16-paragraph scheme of the *Canberra Times* report, the nine paragraphs that follow the intro in consecutive descending order are devoted to a description of the government's claims. Brough's version is privileged in the scheme of the story, even though events have moved beyond the point of the cruiser claims entering the public arena. It is likely that the *Canberra Times* organised the cruiser information in this way because its edition of 21 May represented the newspaper's first opportunity to present the government's claims. Thus where the intro refers to the very recent past – the critics reacted 'yesterday' – the second paragraph involves a construction that associates past and future tenses and focuses not on the critics but their political or ideological opponent and primary source for the story:

Mr Brough said an attitudinal survey, to be issued today by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, showed as many as 100,000 unemployed people were dole bludgers in the true sense of the word.

'These people are content to collect a benefit from the Australian taxpayer and feel that work would have a negative impact on their quality of life and free time,' Mr Brough said. (Macdonald, 2002, p 1)

The *Canberra Times* erroneously attributes to Brough the claim about the maximum number of dole cruisers. As noted previously, the Minister's public statement did not include any reference to an actual number of cruisers.

The phrase ‘true sense of the word’ suggests that the term dole bludger may have more than one meaning or application. As noted previously, the Macquarie Dictionary (2004) defines the term as a derogatory colloquialism – ‘one who is unemployed and lives on social security payments without making proper attempts to find employment’. The *Canberra Times* does not tell its readers if this is the definition it sees as fitting the ‘true sense’ or, alternatively, that it believes this meaning to be the one asserted by the government’s report.

The story offers more information and quotations from the Brough news release and, at paragraph four, incorporates the AAP copy depicting Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson as weighing in to the debate and describing dole cruisers as immoral and un-Australian. Only at paragraph 11, does the report reintroduce the angry critics of the lead paragraph:

Mr Brough came under immediate fire yesterday by the Opposition and community groups, who pointed to failings in the Job Network for putting people off seeking work.

‘It’s Mr Brough’s Job Network that has been cruising,’ Labor’s employment services spokesman David Cox said. (Macdonald, 2002, p 1)

The remaining eight paragraphs of the report comprise additional criticism attributed to Cox and his Opposition colleague Wayne Swan, the ACOSS president and the church welfare group Uniting Care.

The *Canberra Times* published a second cruiser story on 22 May 2002. Like its predecessor, this report also carried the by-line of Emma MacDonald. The headline employed an accusatory stance towards the government and the text presented the government – in the form of the Minister – responding to his critics in a sequence of claims and counterclaims:

Survey of 52 used to damn thousands

Employment Services Minister Mal Brough defended yesterday his use of a survey of 52 people to claim 100,000 unemployed people across Australia were ‘cruisers’ who did not want work.

He also defended his use of the term ‘dole bludger’ after Labor issued a record of 1986 Hansard in which Family and Community Services Minister Amanda Vanstone objected to the “demoralising and insulting term”.

The Australian Council of Social Service questioned on Monday the methodology used in the Government’s survey after Mr Brough issued selected findings. After the survey became publicly available yesterday, council president Andrew McCallum questioned the veracity of the research and accused the Government of manipulating the figures for its advantage.

Mr Brough has used the survey to justify an impending crackdown on welfare rorting, saying it showed 16 per cent of unemployed people did not want to work because it interfered with their freedom and lifestyle.

Mr Brough’s office said a further survey of 3500 people – due out next week – confirmed the original findings and it was valid to assume the 100,000 people fitted the ‘cruiser’ category.

But Mr McCallum said he believed the survey had engaged in a form of push-polling. (McDonald, 2002b, p 3)

As noted previously, van Dijk argues that the use of figures in a news text are an example of ‘persuasive content’, both in terms of suggesting precision in factual information and more broadly in relation to emphasising the factual nature of the content (1988, p 85).

In the context of the *Canberra Times* headline a number supplied by the government is effectively used against the government, for the number of people initially surveyed by the attitudinal researchers – 52 - is presented in relation to the ‘thousands’ criticised by the government. The headline writer uses what can be said to be an opinion-controlled lexical choice (1988, p 81) to relate the two numbers. As we have seen previously, the survey of 52 people was used in the research context to inform the attitudinal segmentation model; however in the headline, the number is described as being used to ‘damn’ – that is, to condemn as bad or unfit – a much larger number.

The headline invites readers to invoke van Dijk’s notion of situation models or ‘what the language user thinks the text is about...’ (1988, p 105). This seven-word headline does not explicitly identify those surveyed or those damned; readers would be expected to fill in the gaps – that is, to see that the text relates to people or a class of people – while also recognising the implicit critique in the operation of the headline. Given its contrasting of the size or weight of the numbers, the headline seems to ask how such a relatively small number could have power over a much bigger, and even open-ended, number. The question also implies a possible answer – that the use referred to in the headline is invalid or improper.

The lead paragraph acts to reinforce the headline as valid because it positions the minister as defending rather than denying the proposition, and it repeats the number 52 while replacing the generalised number of the headline with the precise 100,00 first seen in the initial cruiser reports of the *Daily Telegraph* and *Courier Mail*. In contrast with those

reports, the *Canberra Times* selects the verb ‘claim’ to describe the minister’s application of the research findings to identify the cruisers. In addition, the paper’s reporting transforms a significant aspect of the story through the introduction of the Minister as the source responsible for the 100,000 figure. Although, as noted previously, the original cruiser media release did not contain the figure, its repetitive use by journalists over the previous two days has now seen it linked directly to the government, with the minister’s office reported as saying it was ‘valid to assume’ that 100,000 people were in the cruiser category. Thus, in the *Canberra Times* at least, the government has become the official source for the cruiser quantum.

Notable also in terms of lexical selections is the repetition in headline and text of the verb form to ‘use’ in regard to the relationship between Brough and the survey. The former has used to latter to damn thousands, used it to make claims about them, and used it to justify an impending crackdown. The presence of this particular verb offers readers an opportunity to interpret the text in a variety of ways, albeit with the guidance of the criticism implicit in the headline and made explicit through the accounts of actors such as ACOSS which question the methodology of the survey. The verb to use, after all, contains numerous potential meanings; in the context of this cruiser story, Brough may be seen to be using the survey in the sense of exploiting or even manipulating the findings in order to condemn the cruisers. Thus the macroproposition – or main topic – of the story is the suggestion that Brough’s use of his survey is not valid.

The remaining seven paragraphs of the 13-par report included material supplied by AAP about the ACOSS president and his push-polling analogy, and other material reproducing the argument by the Labor MP Wayne Swan that the cruiser story was an attempt to divert attention from cuts to the disability pension.

The final three paragraphs provided background and a response related to the Opposition's use of historical material to support its critique of the government:

Senator Vanstone said while in Opposition in 1986 "there are many more people seeking jobs than there are jobs available. Those people should not have to be subjected to the term 'dole-bludger'.

She said yesterday, "Most people on the dole are genuinely looking for work. Unfortunately those who aren't give the others a bad name. I like to concentrate on those job-seekers who are doing the right thing, but you can't ignore those who are taking the system for a ride."

A spokesman for Mr Brough said the term was justified because the survey proved such a group of dole bludgers existed. (McDonald, 2002b, p 3)

In her response to her political opponents, the Senator draws on the previous statement of her colleague, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Vanstone uses the phrases 'genuinely looking' and 'bad name' and in doing so also invokes an idea used previously by the government, that welfare rorters will stigmatise the welfare system and all its beneficiaries.

However it is not the Employment Minister, Brough, but his spokesman who is given the final word in the *Canberra Times* report, arguing in effect that the dole bludgers were dole bludgers because the research proved it. Thus in one newspaper, at least, the cruiser

nomenclature was undermined by a focus on an older, more powerful vernacular term in the welfare discourse.

10.11 Australia and ‘notorious’ Kiwis

Among the sample of newspaper versions of the cruiser story was another that diverged significantly in terms of the main angles of reporting. This version – published on 21 May 2002 in the Melbourne *Herald Sun* – focused on a comparison between unemployed people in Australia and New Zealand. The report featured the by-line of Rick Wallace and a succinct headline that combined colloquial notions of the easy, directionless or uncommitted life with a situational reference to government unemployment benefits:

Cruising on the dole.

The story’s intro and second paragraph, however, upped the ante with a censorious element and an implicit invitation to readers to identify with a cross-cultural referencing:

Australia has almost three times as many dole bludgers as New Zealand – often derided as notorious for welfare rorts – research shows. A study commissioned by the Federal Government has found 16 per cent of Australia’s unemployed are “cruisers” who are happy to live on the dole without hunting for work.

But similar research by the same consultants found just 6 per cent of NZ’s unemployed were “cruisers”. (Wallace, 2002, p 10)

Minister Brough features in the story in a way that indicates that reporter Rick Wallace or other *Herald Sun* staff had some direct contact with the minister or his office. This is because the minister is quoted as responding directly to issues raised by the NZ angle. Brough is introduced in the third paragraph as presenting a somewhat contradictory position – international comparisons are not valid but, even so, some comparisons show that Australia performs well:

Employment Services Minister Mal Brough played down unfavourable comparisons with the NZ results.

“You can’t compare one nation totally with another because it’s a different method,” Mr Brough said.

The minister said Australia compared favourably with some European countries in which 30 per cent of unemployed were cruisers. (Wallace, 2002, p 10)

Neither Brough nor the *Herald Sun* provides attribution for the claim that nearly a third of job seekers in some countries are cruisers. Indeed, nowhere in the government’s published attitudinal research or public statements are there any references to similar research or findings relating to European countries.

Having raised the trans Tasman comparison and reported Brough’s response, The *Herald Sun* provided three paragraphs of background information about the research in both countries:

The Australian research was based on a NZ study and both were done by Colmar Brunton Social Research.

Colmar Brunton described the two studies as similar in their report to the minister, although the NZ research was done in the early 1990s.

But the researchers did point out subtle differences in definitions that could affect the size of the categories. (Wallace, 2002, p 10)

Mr Brough then reappeared in the story to provide information that, again, was not to be found within any of the other cruiser sample reports.

Mr Brough said the Government would conduct further research to see if cruisers were clustered in warm coastal areas such as Byron Bay and the Gold Coast. (Wallace, 2002, p 10)

As noted in chapter 4.3, the notion that dole payments might finance a mass internal migration to subtropical beaches had also been in the minds of Social Security bureaucrats in the early 1970s. Mr Brough's apparent revival of this old idea was not linked to anything in the reports provided to him by Colmar Brunton, the briefings given him by his department, or even his own media release. Given the absence of such supporting evidence, the origins of the minister's apparent research plan are obscure. There is no evidence that DEWR subsequently commissioned any research into dole cruiser clustering on climatic criteria.

In the tenth paragraph of the report, The *Herald Sun* provides contextual information that positions the cruiser story as the latest instalment in a welfare discourse involving vigilant administrators and unscrupulous recipients. Notably, the newspaper chooses notionally neutral verbs – emerged and embarks – to describe the presence of the story in the public arena and the official response. In effect, the story has arrived, rather than being deliberately brought by the government; for its part, the government is setting out on another in a series of enterprises to decrease, if not eliminate, an old problem. Here, the

newspaper expects that its readers will recognise the relevant script and its particular policy jargon will require no translation:

The findings have emerged as the Government embarks on further efforts to reduce welfare rorts, including expanding work for the dole and other mutual-obligation programs. (Wallace, 2002, p 10)

If this paragraph of context may be read as notable for the absence of the welfare crackdown lexicon, then the final four paragraphs do provide one example, as uttered by a Labor opposition critic:

But Labor family and community services spokesman Wayne Swan said the study's release was aimed at disguising the Government's unfair attacks on disabled people.

"This isn't a crackdown – at best it's an admission of failure," Mr Swan said.

"What this is about is diverting attention from the Government's record.

"If there are 100,000 people out there bludging on the system as Minister Brough says, then what has the Government been doing about it?" (Wallace, 2002, p 10)

In terms of explicating the background of the story, The *Herald Sun* also provides no referencing in relation to Swan's claim about Government attacks on disabled people. Again, it is likely that the newspaper assumes relevant knowledge on the part of its readers.

As noted, The *Herald Sun* published its report one day after the initial, exclusive versions of the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail*. This time lag may provide at least some explanation for the Melbourne newspaper's partial departure from the script of the Minister's media

release. Certainly, the paper provided more of a political context for its report than some of the other newspapers in the research sample.

In contrast with the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* treatments of the story, the introduction of the critical number – the 100,000 cruisers – was left to the last paragraph of the story and appeared within the context of a quote from a government opponent.

Despite the somewhat anomalous elements of the report, the *Herald Sun* version of the cruiser story did not challenge the underlying premise about the confirmed existence of a mass of feckless unemployed people. Indeed, the newspaper presented its readers with a construction of the story that fell well within the political and moral framing of mainstream welfare discourse, with an invitation to judge Australian bludgers against international standards, and the invocation of concepts based on a linkage between State-funded indolence and sun-worshipping hedonists.

10.12 ‘Sick of life on the dole’

As we have seen, the initial reporting of the attitudinal segmentation research was done in two newspapers – the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier Mail* – owned by News Limited.

Almost one week after those reports, the remaining version of the story considered for this thesis was published in another News Limited paper, the Queensland *Sunday Mail*.

Unlike the other sampled publications, the *Sunday Mail* is a weekly newspaper. Its report ran on page 20, under the by-line of Elissa Lawrence.

Once again, the cruiser reporting featured a relationship of numbers in a headline; this time, however, the numbers were associated with a story frame that represented implicit rejection of the easy life on the dole model promoted by the government:

600 tries in six years...still no job – Father is sick of life on the dole

Robert Oldham has tried just about everything to get a job.

Mr Oldham, 31, of Rochedale in Brisbane's south, has been on the dole since 1996 – but has applied for 600 jobs. He has a TAFE diploma in accounting and is one subject from completing a Bachelor of Business.

This year, the former boilermaker has received about 250 rejections.

Mr Oldham, who is married with an eight-year-old daughter, blames Australia's economy for a shortage of jobs rather than his lack of motivation or skill.

The headline and first three paragraphs of the report contain a summary or history of one individual's experience of unemployment but no reference – explicit or implicit – to the attitudinal segmentation research or the government's public statements about their application. Notably, there is an element of emphasis that stops short of hyperbole because of the qualifying 'just about' that undercuts a literal reading in the first paragraph description of the subject's attempts to secure work. The actual range or nature of these attempts is not described; instead the reference to 'just about everything' can be read as an indication of Oldham's unrelenting diligence in pursuit of work.

Only in the fourth paragraph is there an initial – and indirect – link to the cruiser issue, via a rejection of the notion that an individual’s lack of motivation might be a cause of unemployment.

The initial three paragraphs function as a portrait of the subject of the story. Robert Oldham’s age, marital and parental status, residential location and education and employment history are provided by way of a backgrounding that is given context only in the report’s fourth paragraph. This paragraph describes information that provides the rationale for the portrait. In terms of the news schemata discussed by van Dijk (1988, p 53) paragraph four contains the previous event that conditions the account of the activities and opinions of this individual job seeker:

A federal Department of Employment Services study last week categorised the unemployed into types, including highly motivated “drivers” and those happy to be on the dole, dubbed “cruisers” (Lawrence, 2002, p20)

Against this previous event, the headline and opening paragraphs provide a new situation model. There is the government-promoted model of the happily unemployed dole cruiser, the (implicit and parallel) model of the unhappy taxpayer, and now that of the unhappy dole recipient who is sick of life on the dole.

In what may be interpreted as a replication of the Brough case against the cruisers, the Oldham story builds a case that both outlines his virtue and provides a repudiation of the cruiser criticism. At paragraph five, this repudiation is manifested in individualised testimony that makes a claim on individual dignity:

Mr Oldham said he was insulted to be labelled a dole bludger. (Lawrence, 2002, p20)

As we have seen in other cruisers reports, the Minister used the notion of the label when he asserted that the cruisers ‘give genuine job seekers a bad name and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers’. However this information is not provided or further referenced in the *Sunday Mail* report, so the specific origins of the insult that Oldham perceives are not made clear. Readers are thus required to make the cognitive connection and infer, along with Oldham, that cruisers are synonymous with bludgers.

In the next four paragraphs, Oldham is presented as further justifying his defensive position:

“A lot of people out there have given up,” he said. “I have a degree and yet I can’t get a job anywhere.

“It’s typical of this Government to blame the unemployed to take the spotlight away from their failure to create jobs.

“I have written to an employment consultant. I have been informed that there is nothing wrong with my background, my resume, or my university grade-point average.

I must conclude that the problem is lack of jobs.” (Lawrence, 2002, p 20)

The newspaper lists a series of propositions by Oldham; he perseveres where many others do not, the government routinely blame shifts, he has external confirmation that he is not to blame for his unemployment and, in summary, it is logical to arrive at the view that there is insufficient employment for him and others.

Having presented what is effectively part two of the Oldham argument, the newspaper then presents a single paragraph of unsourced information of a type that is not easily distinguished, as van Dijk notes, as either background or context (1988, p 53):

After Tasmania, Queensland has the highest unemployment rate, at 7.6 per cent, above the national average of 6.3 per cent. (Lawrence, 2002, p 20)

This presentation of data on specific labour markets may be read as providing support for the Oldham critique for he is in Queensland and that state has the nation's second highest rate of unemployment.

The remaining three paragraphs of the 14-par story present more information about Mr Oldham, including the amount of income he receives fortnightly in unemployment benefits, his casual employment history and details of his search for fulltime work. The last paragraph provides another numbers ratio:

He said he has applied for jobs where there were 17,000 applicants for 150 positions. (Lawrence, 2002, p 20)

The numbers – these persuasive content features described by van Dijk – have what that commentator argues is a functional coherence; that is, each number is part of a proposition in the text that has a specific function in relation to a previous proposition (1988, p 59-60). The proposition that there are far too many applicants for a given job is related to Oldham's conclusion that there is a lack of jobs and to other propositions concerning the merit of his repeated attempts to find a job.

To my knowledge, there were no cruiser-related news stories published in Australian newspapers after publication of the *Sunday Mail* version. This being so, the story as a news story was current for the period from 20 – 26 May 2002.

Consideration of the presentation of the story in the 15 newspapers in the sample follows in the next section.

10.13 Presentation and prominence

Analysis of the page placement and story length in the cruiser sample newspapers indicates considerable diversity in treatment of the story. As is evident in the table below, word length ranged from a low of 48 words in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to a high of 693 words in *The Age*. A similar degree of diversity was evident in relation to page placement, with the story appearing on the front page in two newspapers through to page 11 in one newspaper. The one weekly newspaper in the sample presented the story on page 20 in an edition that was published six days after the initial coverage and three days after the last in the sequence of cruiser stories appeared in a daily newspaper.

As noted previously in section 1.5, Putnis found that in his sample of two broadsheet newspapers and two tabloid newspapers, the latter pair presented stories about alleged welfare fraud with much more prominence than did the former. Although each of Putnis' sample newspapers is also present in the dole cruiser sample, this tabloid/broadsheet dichotomy appears to be of little relevance to my study, given the diverse treatment provided by both categories of newspaper. For example, the broadsheet *The Age*

displayed its report prominently on page three and devoted more words than any other paper in the sample, other than the tabloid *Courier Mail*. That paper presented its exclusive report on the front page while the other exclusive version ran on the relative obscurity of page seven in its tabloid format sister, The *Daily Telegraph*. Meanwhile the broadsheet *Sydney Morning Herald* and the national specialist business daily the *Australian Financial Review* used comparatively few words – 48 and 87 respectively – to tell their readers about the dole cruisers but the *SMH* ran its version on page two and the *AFR* relegated the story to page 9. In each case, however, those single paragraph reports appeared in news in brief columns, thereby downgrading their prominence and the significance assigned to them relative to all other reports on the page.

In van Dijk's analysis, the methods news media use to present content constitute part of what he calls the form aspect of rhetoric; that is, the elements of display – for example the size and placement of a headline and story – will signal the extent to which a publication seeks to persuade its readers about the truthfulness or credibility of a subject story (1988, pp 83-4).

However, if van Dijk's analysis is used to consider presentation of the dole cruiser story, no clear pattern emerges as a result of the diversity of approaches by the sample newspapers. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier Mail* provided the strongest endorsement of the government's source material, but while the latter presented the story on its front page with the single highest word count (748), the latter used page seven and the fourth highest word count (549). Among the more sceptical publications, the

Canberra Times also used the front page and *The Age* ran the story on page three; these papers used, respectively, the third and second highest word counts (688 and 693)

The *Herald Sun*'s comparison of NZ and Australian bludgers used relatively few words (296) and appeared on page 10, while the *Townsville Bulletin*'s report, featuring the critical polemic of a local unemployment activist, made the third page.

The analysis in this thesis does not take account of relative differences between sample publications – including consideration of other news stories that were published in those editions that carried the cruiser story – but it is clear that there is no clear correlation between pro-or-anti-welfare editorial stances and the presentation of the story in each of the sample papers.

Newspaper	Prominence (page number)	Report length (by paragraph)	Word count
<i>Courier Mail a</i>	1	23	748
<i>Canberra Times</i>	1	20	688
<i>Courier Mail b</i>	2	14	382
<i>Illawarra Mercury</i>	2	10	251
<i>Hobart Mercury</i>	2	7	219
<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>	2	1	48
<i>The Age</i>	3	20	693
<i>West Australian</i>	3	15	435
<i>Canberra Times b</i>	3	13	426
<i>Townsville Bulletin</i>	3	14	383
<i>Melbourne MX</i>	5	11	325
<i>Cairns Post</i>	7	3	114
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	7	18	549

AFR	9	1	87
<i>Herald Sun</i>	10	14	296
<i>Adelaide Advertiser</i>	11	4	126
<i>Sunday Mail</i>	20	14	283

Courier Mail a & b represent separate reports published respectively on 20 & 21 May 2002; *Canberra Times* a & b represent separate reports published on 21 & 22 May 2002.

Chapter 11

11.1 ‘Brough Releases First Report’

The basis for the Government’s public claims about the dole cruisers was to be found in the reports on the qualitative and quantitative research into the attitudes of job seekers. As noted elsewhere, these reports were the subject of departmental briefings to the minister in a six-week period leading up to his initial public statement about the cruisers.

However neither of these reports was released to the media until 21 May 2002, more than a day after the Government’s provision of selected information about the dole cruisers to the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier Mail*.

As we have also seen, on May 21, the minister issued a second media release – ‘Brough Releases First Report On Job Seeker Attitudes’. This seven paragraph release announced the availability on the department’s website of a report that ‘details the findings of in-depth qualitative research of a sample of 52 job seekers’. The statement announced that a second report containing ‘the detailed quantitative findings’ would be released ‘within the week’ from May 21. As to the rationale and the timing of the release of the first report, and the foreshadowed release of the second, the statement quoted the Minister himself:

Mr Brough said the release of the reports would counter misinformation spread by Opposition Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services, Wayne Swan.

Mr Swan has claimed Mr Brough’s recent comments relating to “cruising” job seekers was (sic) based on interviews with just a handful of job seekers.

“This is plainly wrong and is typical of the type of disinformation campaign Wayne Swan is famous for,” Mr Brough said.

The first report is now available on www.dewr.gov.au (Brough, 2002b)

The release of the reports could thus be interpreted as motivated by the Government’s political contest with the Opposition, rather than as the provision of evidence to support the Minister’s criticism and policy prescriptions about dole bludgers. Notably, neither report was released before – or even at the same time as – the Government told *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Courier Mail* about the cruiser findings. Indeed, the first report was made public only after all but one of the newspapers in my sample had published their stories about the cruisers.

It is unclear why the Government chose to forgo the opportunity to release at least the first report at the same time as the distribution of the initial Brough media statement.

Whether intended by the Government or not, the effect of the delayed release was to limit the public circulation of the qualitative research findings on the cruisers. Among the 15 newspapers, The *Canberra Times* noted in its story that the research ‘study’ was due to be released that day – 21 May – and *The Age* edition of the same date reported that it had seen a copy of the report that had been ‘circulated’ by the Minister. However, none of the 15 papers followed up with any further reports that focused on or included consideration of the qualitative material.

The absence of further reporting may be interpreted as indicative of a rapid churning of news through a media cycle in which the majority of stories are given brief coverage and then vanish. There are, as van Dijk notes, constraints of journalistic practice and organization, including deadlines, which tend to limit the number of possible ‘news situations’ at any given time (1988, p 113).

However, it may also be true that there was no follow up scrutiny of the attitudinal research once it was available because none of the sampled newspapers judged this to be necessary. None, in van Dijk’s terms, may have considered the publication of the research to be a news situation, even though that research originated from the same credible and authoritative source – the Government – that had provided the original cruiser story.

One explanation for such an editorial judgement would be that because coverage of the dole cruiser story was played out in a political welfare discourse model, once each of the

main political actors had been reported on, there would be no further need to continue with the story. Under such a model, political sources are provided with lead roles on the media stage and consideration or even analysis of other sources is limited. It is thus the act of political speech about welfare subjects, rather than evidence supporting that speech, that is the primary determinant in the life cycle of the cruiser story.

Indeed, it is notable that Minister Brough's stated motive for releasing research findings was to 'counter misinformation' allegedly spread by his political opponents. The minister was not, apparently, sharing the evidence with the community in order to demonstrate the validity of his desire to discipline the cruisers. Equally, if the media saw no need to test the evidence, then it may be that this was because the entire story was essentially a political one and thus the evidence was not relevant.

The content of that first, unreported, report is considered in the next section.

11.2 'Insightful, honest, and intimate understanding'

The first of the reports released by the Minister could be read by anybody with access to the DEWR website from 21 May 2002. The report's co-authors were Colmar Brunton Social Research and the Service Quality Analysis Section, Labour Market Policy Group, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. They called their report 'Job Seeker Attitudinal Segmentation An Australian Model'.

Some of the language of the executive summary of the report was very similar to that used in DEWR's briefing to the Minister in March 2002, indicating that the departmental officials who wrote the briefing had closely followed elements of the text in the report. The first sentence of the executive summary, for example, contained information based on notions of common – and implicitly unchallenged or unchallengeable – wisdom.

It is widely recognised that a job seeker's attitude can have a significant impact on their success in finding employment. (Colmar Brunton Social Research & DEWR, 2002, p 2)

The same assertion was expressed in the ministerial briefing note (appendix A):

It is widely recognised that job seekers' attitudes to job search can have a major impact on their success in finding work.

The treatment of the sentence in the briefing text involved the substitution of a plural – job seekers' attitudes – for the singular construction in the executive summary, thus generalising the matter of attitude. Simultaneously, the writers of the briefing insert specificity in relation to attitudes, so that it is attitudes to job search that are the focus. In addition, the original notion of consequence – 'a significant impact' – was replaced in the briefing by a more intense emphasising of the implied importance of the nexus of attitudes and unemployment through the use of 'major impact'.

The executive summary of the report also described the methodology the researchers used to acquire and analyse information about job seekers' attitudes.

The consultants developed a segmentation tool consisting of twenty-one statements designed to differentiate job seekers on the basis of their motivation and level of limitation. These statements were included in a survey of job seekers [2001 Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey]. Job seekers were asked their level of agreement (or disagreement) with the statements using a 10 point scale. (Colmar Brunton Social Research & DEWR, 2002, p 3)

However the report also indicated that the use of the survey was preceded by a ‘qualitative research phase’ involving 52 ‘motivational in-depth interviews with job seekers in the ACT and rural, regional and metropolitan areas in New South Wales’. The interviews were conducted in December 2000.

The methodology outlined in the report appeared in part to involve statistical techniques and in part relied on certain characteristics of the researchers. In relation to data analysis:

A factor analysis was performed on the data collected, to develop the segmentation model. A discriminant model of the segmentation was then developed using discriminant analysis. The discriminant model defines an algorithm (rule) which allows the model to be replicated at any point in time and for any sample. (Colmar Brunton Social Research & DEWR, 2002, p 3)

In contrast to this technical jargon, the report also included a description of human values, including some purportedly featured by the researchers:

The research required an insightful, honest and intimate understanding of job seekers in order to develop a segmentation model that appropriately and ‘truly’ captured the Australian job seeker market. To achieve this CBSR [Colmar Brunton] employed the use of qualitative in-depth interviews conducted on a one-on-one basis with job seekers. CBSR utilised a number of probing and projective techniques drawn from clinical psychology. This meant that deeper, emotive issues were revealed as well as more rational issues.

A strong rapport was developed between researcher and participant, enabling an in-depth exploration and identification of the beliefs and attitudes driving job search behaviour. (Colmar Brunton Social Research & DEWR, 2002, p 6)

The report provided no verifiable evidence for its assertions about the qualities of its interviewers – described as ‘senior researchers, experienced in conducting research of this nature with people from all walks of life’. Nor did it explain the evidentiary basis for identifying and differentiating the ‘deeper emotive issues’ from the ‘more rational issues’ reportedly revealed by the unemployed respondents.

There is criticism of the application of clinical psychology techniques in market research. Professor Tony Winefield, from the School of Psychology, University of South Australia, told the Background Briefing program prepared as part of this thesis, that there is no evidence to support use of such techniques:

Tony Winefield: Projective tests are notoriously unreliable. Anyone trained in scientific psychology would agree on that. Projective tests include things like the Rorschach and the thematic apperception tests, but they are notoriously unreliable.

Gareth Robinson: Do they also include things like getting people to draw pictures?

Tony Winefield: Yes, yes. And interpreting ink blots.

Gareth Robinson: And yet I’m told that these are standard techniques in market research and now in this social marketing approach.

Tony Winefield: But what a lot of market researchers do is garbage, and what a lot of clinical psychologists do as well I’m afraid is garbage, those particularly who don’t operate in accordance with the scientist practitioner model.

Gareth Robinson: And what is that model?

Tony Winefield: Well it assumes that practice is guided by scientific evidence. In medicine, it’s known as evidence-based research, and there are standards of evidence, you require well-controlled studies that can demonstrate an effect using proper measuring instruments, and those sorts of techniques as far as I am aware, have never been applied to assessing the usefulness of projective tests. (Robinson, 2005)

Professor Winefield also expressed scepticism about the findings of the attitudinal segmentation research:

First of all, this kind of pigeonholing assumes that people can be neatly put into one pigeonhole, whereas in fact they might show behaviours or characteristics which would make sense for them to be put into more than one pigeonhole. But I think more serious is the assumption that people can't move, that is, it assumes a static model and I think that there's probably not very good evidence to support that, and I think particularly when it comes to attitudes, people's attitudes vary all the time. They're influenced by things like mood, which in turn is influenced by time of day, whether your football team has won; there are all sorts of things that affect people's attitudes and if you simply interview them at one particular point in time, you may come up with a completely different label or category for them, than if you interviewed them at a different time. (Robinson, 2005)

As noted in section 7.2, the first of two ministerial briefings on the research foreshadowed future work that would determine whether people move between the attitudinal segments over time. The proposition that the behaviours of the unemployed might be fluid and not fixed could tend to undermine the proposition underpinning the Government's public criticism and policy prescription for the cruisers. The Government's argument was, in effect, that these people had to be forced to change; change would be a function of administrative power, rather than a product of range of variables as suggested by Professor Winefield.

For the purposes of the Brough media release, however, Winefield's 'static model' was the one in play. The Minister portrayed the dole cruisers unambiguously not only as dole bludgers but as remaining constantly in this state over time.

The findings of the researchers also raised questions about the nature of what the Minister referred to as the longstanding 'anecdotal evidence' about the bludging unemployed.

These findings are considered in the next section.

11.3 ‘The stereotype... is not supported’

The delayed release of the first research report, coupled with the absence of any subsequent coverage, limited opportunities for reporting in ways that might have deviated from the premises outlined in the Minister’s initial media release.

Among such opportunities was one potential story angle concerning the longstanding stereotypical view noted by Law of dole bludgers as being mainly young, male and anti social (2001, p 33). That was the view in the 1970s. More than 25 years later, Colmar Brunton and its DEWR colleagues wrote in their qualitative report:

It is interesting to note that the proportion of job seekers in the *Cruising* segment does not change significantly with age and gender. Consequently the perception or stereotype that young male job seekers are more likely to be *Cruising* ...than other groups is not supported in this research. (Colmar Brunton Social Research & DEWR, 2002, pp 6-7)

Such a finding might challenge longstanding suspicions about a relatively weak work ethic among young people and a related view that the young might be more responsible than other demographic groups for their own lack of employment (Eardley and Matheson, 1999, p 11, 31). However, the finding and any implications it might hold for unemployment policy remained unremarked by the Government and unreported by the media. A chance to reconsider a stereotype went begging. Also unreported was a finding about job seekers with a disability. In this case, the report authors wrote:

It is interesting to note that [job seekers with a disability] are significantly more likely to be in the Disempowered segment than job seekers without a disability....job seekers with a disability appear to be less likely to be Drivers and Selectives. (Colmar Brunton Social Research & DEWR, 2002, p 11)

Thus in the terms expressed by the Minister's first media release, job seekers with a disability were more likely to 'want to work but have lost all confidence in themselves and their skills' (Brough, 2002a). This finding could have had implications for a debate current in May 2002, over government proposals to push more people with disabilities away from disability benefits and onto the dole and its associated job search requirements.

Chapter 12

12.1 Response from the department

As noted, the question of how the dole cruisers might be evading their responsibilities was predicated on assumptions about their existence. Questions about the number or prevalence of cruisers were not raised in any of the news reports identified for the purpose of this thesis.

During an e-mail exchange in August 2004 I asked DEWR's Labour Market & Policy Group whether it was true in May 2002 that about 100,000 people were not complying with job search/Mutual Obligation requirements. DEWR replied in these terms:

Those in the cruiser group were those who have been identified as not really wanting a job even though they might comply with job search or mutual obligation requirements.

The media interpreted this as 16% of those on the dole. In fact, the study related to all those registered as unemployed. As you would be aware, not all those registered as unemployed are on Newstart or Youth Allowance (Other) and so would not be required to comply with Mutual Obligations requirements.

The Department also noted in its response that among the 3,500 respondents to ‘the study’ were 450 job seekers who were sole parents or people with a disability and likely to be on other social security benefits rather than unemployment benefits. In addition, another 250 respondents were people who were registered as unemployed but were not receiving any allowance.

Therefore, according to DEWR’s numbers, the survey of 3500 unemployed people included 700 – or 20 per cent – who were not on the dole, not subject to requirements to seek work and therefore not classifiable as dole bludgers. Although DEWR’s response to my questions effectively blamed the media for misinterpreting the Minister’s statement, it is clear that the fourth paragraph of the Minister’s media release misled both the media and the community by stating in relation to the cruisers that:

They give genuine job seekers a bad name and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers.
(Brough, 2002a)

In addition, this statement was misleading because it was at odds with the Department’s advice to me – as noted above - that the cruisers were people who might comply with job search or mutual obligation requirements. How could people merit – in the Brough typology – the label of dole bludger if they were actually complying with the administrative conditions attached to unemployment benefits?

While the minister's media release insisted that dole cruisers were synonymous with dole bludgers – that is, recipients of unemployment benefits – it did not distinguish between the category of jobless who were subject to formal job search requirements and those who were exempt from those requirements.

According to the minister's department, the source of the interpretation that the dole cruisers amounted to 100,000 people was the media. Certainly, and as noted elsewhere, the minister's media release of 20 May 2002 did not include any reference to that specific number. The release referred to:

(A)s many as one in six 'job seekers' --- [and] 'a segment of job seekers – about 16 per cent. (Brough, 2002a)

It is a matter of some curiosity that the minister's initial reference in the release to job seekers was appended by single quotation marks – 'job seekers'. The reason for using this grammatical device is unclear and a matter for speculation. Were the authors of the release indicating an ironic stance towards job seekers who were not genuine 'job seekers'? Or were these authors providing a linguistic gesture towards knowledge they may have held about a major flaw in the Minister's public claim about the cruisers? Did they know that the numbers did not add up and was this a reason why the media release contained a cruiser ratio, and a cruiser percentage but no explicit numbers?

On 10 July 2003, more than a year after the cruiser release, officials from DEWR presented a paper about their attitudinal segmentation work at the Australian social policy conference 'Social Inclusion' at the University of New South Wales. The paper was titled

‘Attitudes and job search: what we know now’. I attended the conference as a research student and was present at a workshop discussion when the officials reported on what they called an update about the attitudinal findings.

According to the notes I made during the workshop, the officials said that attitude was one of the factors that ‘impact success’ in finding work and that the attitudinal study was ‘not intended to pigeonhole’ job seekers. In relation to the cruisers, they reported that this group was not – or not only – ‘boys on skateboards’. As to the prevalence of the cruisers, the officials reported that a new round of research had surveyed 4,000 job seekers, all of whom were on unemployment benefits and subject to job search requirements. This new round of analysis produced a new estimate on the size of the cruiser segment – 11 per cent.

The 11 per cent figure was lower than the estimate of 16 per cent announced by Minister Brough in 2002. Based on the national unemployment total prevailing around the time of the announcement, the revision represented a reduction of about 40,000 cruisers from the total reported by the media.

Apart from the DEWR conference presentation – which attracted no media attention – the Government did not publicly refer to the new lower estimate about the prevalence of dole cruisers. It is also notable that at the time of the reporting of the minister’s original claims, the Government never challenged or corrected the media’s multiple references to the existence of 100,000 dole cruisers.

12.2 Bludgers 'set to return'

In November 2007, voters rejected the Howard Government in favour of a new administration led by Labor's Kevin Rudd. The new government chose to maintain a tight compliance regime for people on unemployment benefits. Although the government did not emulate the punitive rhetoric of its predecessor, it still drew on many of the common elements of welfare policy discourse. In May 2008, for example, the Minister for Human Services, Senator Joe Ludwig, announced funding in the new Federal Budget to 'boost the fight' against welfare fraud. In a media release, the Minister employed some of the same rhetorical devices that had been uttered by his counterparts in the former Howard administration: most welfare recipients were virtuous and, by inference, the integrity of the system that served them was intact. Thus:

The majority of Centrelink customers are honest and combating welfare fraud is about making sure that the right payments go to the right people at the right time.

[and] This announcement sends a clear message that the Government is serious about cracking down on welfare fraud. (Ludwig, 2008)

Notwithstanding the government's rhetorical seriousness, as the effects of the global recession became apparent through 2008, any focus on blaming the unemployed for their plight was less likely to receive widespread support.

However, the economic situation did not prevent an attempt by the Opposition in September 2008 to invoke the spectre of dole bludgers as part of a critique of the

Government's approach to employment services and activity testing for jobless people.

Brisbane's *Courier Mail* was one of a number of newspapers that carried an AAP report about criticism of government reforms:

The dole bludger is set to return to the nation's lounges thanks to Government changes to the privatised job network, the federal Opposition says.

The Rudd Government is in the process of overhauling the former Howard Government's job network, including cutting down on the number of people who "breached" and have their dole payments cancelled.

The Coalition says the reforms could lead to a return of the dole bludger.

"Under the new (Labor) regime we may well see the revival of the dole bludger," Opposition employment participation spokesman Andrew Southcott told Parliament. (Draper, 2008, p 5)

On the day of publication by the *Courier Mail*, the Sydney commercial radio station 2SM interviewed the Opposition MP, Southcott. A transcript of the interview published on the politician's website showed that he was introduced by radio presenter Grant Goldman in these terms:

Opposition employment participation spokesman Andrew Southcott has told parliament under the new Labor regime we may well see the revival of that dole bludger [sic]. He says employment service providers are being asked not to breach people who fail to attend interviews. Well why? It's our money and that's not being spent in the right way. If they're failing to attend interviews and are quite happy to take the money and do nothing else. They fail to attend interviews, meetings, work experience or Work for the Dole and they're not issued breach notices. These measures were only introduced by the Howard Government to respond to a growing concern of deliberate work avoidance. It's a fact. It's what we the people wanted. Under Labor job seekers will not have undertaken Work for the Dole until they've had a minimum 12-18 months assistance instead of 6 months. Gee, it's an easy life (inaudible), Geez we're a soft touch. The Opposition employment participation spokesman Andrew Southcott joins us on the line, good morning Andrew.

The Opposition's political premise – promoted with the enthusiastic support of media figures such as Goldman – appeared to be that the current Government was risking not only a revival but also a proliferation of dole bludgers. Further, dole bludger numbers had been satisfactorily controlled and contained by the previous administration.

There were other contributions to welfare discourses in the final months of 2008. Welfare rights advocates were also critical of the federal government but for markedly different reasons than those outlined by the Opposition:

Plans by the Rudd Government to overhaul the Social Security penalty compliance regime are too risky, provide too few safeguards, the penalties are too high and are way too complex, according to the National Welfare Rights Network. (NWRN, 2008)

The NWRN argued that the government's proposed new arrangements would penalise specific groups of unemployed people, including parents with children and people with mental illness. In addition, the NWRN said that the arrangements would be:

(u)nlikely to meet the Government's objective of introducing a compliance system that encourages and fosters engagement [with job search activities]. (NRWN, 2008)

The welfare advocates and the Government's political opponents were engaging, broadly, in the same welfare discourse but each relied on significantly different presuppositions about the characteristics of jobless people.

In the view of the Opposition and some media commentators, dole bludgers were people who would act with impunity and would be 'quite happy' to exploit any relaxing of

necessary controls. In contrast, the NWRN saw jobless people as vulnerable to their own and other circumstances, and who therefore required assistance rather than a punitive approach.

The political and media welfare discourses of late 2008 indicated that, even in times of economic hardship and downturn, the dole bludger would never be too far removed from a central position in an ongoing debate.

12.3 The cruisers' legacy

More than two years after the Brough announcement about the dole cruisers, I asked his department what policy or administrative changes had been implemented as a result of the attitudinal segmentation research. In an email in August 2004 I also asked what specific actions had been taken to implement the Minister's statement in May 2002 that the Government would 'identify cruising dole recipients and make their lifestyle less attractive'. (Brough, 2002a) In its response, DEWR wrote:

'The attitudinal segmentation research is a work in progress and so has not been directly used in policy development or for changes to administrative arrangements. Officers of the department involved in policy and the administration of programmes and services are obviously aware of the development of the attitudinal segmentation model and this may have influenced their work.

No attempt to identify cruisers has been made. Mutual obligations requirements have continued to develop and along with the Active Participation Model will ensure that job seekers are actively involved in job search or some form of employment services.'

As noted elsewhere, the initial attitudinal segmentation interviews with a sample of 52 jobless people took place late in 2000. Nearly four years later – at the time of the DEWR answers to my questions – the research findings had not been used in any policy or administrative setting. In particular, the Minister's threats to target the dole cruisers remained unfulfilled.

Indeed, the cruisers' moment in the spotlight was very brief, and not only in policy or media terms.

In August 2003, a linguist delivered a presentation about modern Australian English to a group of editors. The editors' newsletter subsequently noted that the linguist – Dr Amanda Laugesen from the Australian National Dictionary Centre – raised questions about:

the effects of globalisation on purely Australian forms, suggesting that even the youth culture was more internationalised than it had been in the past. Nonetheless she told us that great Australian word *dag* was still current. She treated us to words she said were purely Australian [including]: dole cruiser for dole bludger. (Canberra Society of Editors, 2003)

Later, I asked the National Dictionary Centre about the provenance and longevity of the cruiser terminology in public discourse. In an e-mail to me dated 29 July 2004, a staff member from the Centre confirmed my research indicating that the cruiser term vanished from all public discourse after the brief period of media coverage in May 2002:

I've done a bit of fossicking in our archives and on the Internet, and you are right that 'dole cruiser' and 'cruiser' are not terms which have caught on. As you say there is no evidence of use after the

initial flurry in 2002.

Amanda's talk to the Soc. of Eds. was within a year of Mal Brough's media release. At that stage we would still have been considering it as a potential candidate for inclusion in our dictionaries, which is what would have prompted her comments. The lack of further evidence has meant that it didn't warrant inclusion, and no other dictionaries seem to have picked up the term--certainly neither here nor in New Zealand.

Perhaps one reason that 'cruiser' didn't take is that 'bludger', which has a long history in Australian English, is a word too ensconced in the Australian lexicon (and our collective psyche?) to be easily replaced.

Perhaps the Minister, Mal Brough, would agree with the National Dictionary Centre's view that the word bludger was too strongly embedded in the vernacular to be dislodged by a label provided by the social research company Colmar Brunton.

After all, Mr Brough's original media statement did not suggest or even imply that dole cruiser should be the new standard name for this particular category of people on unemployment benefits.

On the contrary. The cruiser nomenclature did not stick because nobody had a reason to discard the existing terminology.

Indeed, the minister himself had pointed out in his original statement that the cruisers should be called dole bludgers not only because they were - but also because they had earned the term. They 'deserved' it.

Chapter 13

13.1 Conclusion

This thesis and its central case study has demonstrated failings in media practice and cast some light on what can be characterised as a symbiotic relationship between the media and its institutional sources in politics.

The thesis aimed to describe and consider a news story about a category of welfare recipients who were the subject of recurrent criticism by government policy makers and negative media representation over an extended period.

The main goal of the thesis was to determine whether and to what extent media presentations of the story endorsed an elite anti-welfare consensus; that is, that unemployment is, at least in part, a social problem based on individual pathology and that this is expressed in the form of individualised parasitical behaviour at the expense of a virtuous majority of the population. Furthermore, the consensus involves notions of justifiable punishment of those who transgress social norms.

In order to test the thesis goal, the research aimed to examine aspects of the production of the story that are usually not open to independent scrutiny. These aspects of the story were constituted in a sequence of what may be termed sub-stories.

The first of these was the story told by a private sector research company in collaboration with a government authority. The second element was the story the government authority told to the political authority responsible for policy formulation and public expressions of policy and administrative activity.

Third was the story the politicians told to the media and this sub-story featured elements of a strategy for disseminating information to the public. Lastly, as we have seen, was the dole cruiser and attitudinal segmentation story as told in 15 separate newspapers over a seven-day period in 2002.

In summary, the first and second parts of the story sequence involved private presentations of information that emphasised the validity and utility of research that identified a population of unemployed people in the context of what purported to be their motivation and attitudes in relation to the search for employment.

In particular, two internal briefing reports provided by a government department to its minister asserted the significance and value of information provided by researchers. Simultaneously, however, the second of two briefings also asserted that in relation to the dole cruisers, the absence of conclusive evidence about their activities over time did not mitigate against a finding that their attitudes about seeking work were a significant factor in job search activity.

Notably, the authors of the briefing also told their political colleagues that the dole cruisers were only one of several groups identified in the research that warranted concern and associated future policy action.

However, as we have seen, the Minister chose to focus almost exclusively on the dole cruisers in his public statement. Further, he distributed that statement on an initially limited and preferential basis, to one newspaper in Sydney and another in Brisbane.

The same statement was subsequently released to all relevant media, after the first recipients had published versions of the cruiser story. The Minister also subsequently released part of the source material – a report about some of the research findings – but this only occurred after most of the media in the research sample had published their own versions of the cruiser story.

At the heart of the Minister's statement was an assertion about the truthfulness and validity of the research findings. On this assertion the government founded its threats to target and discipline those job seekers characterised as wilfully idle.

This thesis demonstrated a number of issues previously unreported. Notably, the government got its numbers wrong in relation to the dole cruisers. The statistical basis of the claim that one in six job seekers was a dole cruiser was invalid, because the research population included a significant minority of people (20 per cent) who were not on unemployment benefits and not subject to any form of mutual obligation activity. As

demonstrated, government officials subsequently revised the data but never publicly identified the initial flaws in the information released by the Minister. In particular, the government did not seek to correct the media reports that said there were as many as 100,000 cruisers.

Further, it can be argued that the Minister's presentation of the information was not only incorrect but also misleading.

The thesis also demonstrated aspects of the political context of administrative policy on unemployment. Among these, a freedom of information exercise identified a marked reluctance on the part of officialdom to divulge internal documents, extending to the use of partial censorship in relation to documents that were released. In short, one of the participants in what both van Dijk and Chomsky would describe as producers of an elite consensus preferred to operate in secrecy in relation to its deliberations concerning a significant number of Australian citizens.

Further, despite government statements about plans to target dole cruisers, the thesis also identified that no such plans were formulated or implemented. This being so, it is possible to conclude that the Minister's public statements about the dole cruisers were designed to reinforce an existing stance rather than use new data and new evidence to create new responses to issues of unemployment, including the provision of job search services to unemployed people.

Thus what purported to be novel in the cruiser story – the new evidence that replaced common anecdotal knowledge and provided a valid basis for quantifying dole bludgers in Australia – was applied only in relation to a pre-existing agenda. This new evidence did not lead to new policy or administrative outcomes.

It is against this background that the primary research goal must be considered. To what extent did the media – in the form of the sample newspapers – participate in promoting the agenda as presented by the government and its public and private sector colleagues? To what extent did the media respond critically and sceptically to this information?

This thesis has succeeded in demonstrating that the large majority of the newspapers presented the story in terms that endorsed the veracity and validity of the source material provided by the government.

However, it is notable that this presentation was not uniform across the sample group and to this extent, the Chomskian propaganda model does not hold up as a complete theoretical model of a media welfare discourse in the Australian context.

Clearly, some of the cruiser reports conformed to that model and also to the reporting typologies identified by Putnis and Pieper. Much of the reporting followed an anti-welfare model in which individual welfare recipients are sidelined and issues are contextualised in what is effectively a triangulation of political discourse. In this three-

sided model, the government sets an agenda, the opposition opposes, and specialist interests – in this case, mainstream welfare advocates – are heard as subsidiary voices.

But a minority of newspapers – notably the *Canberra Times* and *The Age* – displayed significant degrees of scepticism that were apparent in their deviation from the Minister's singular focus on the dole cruisers.

In line with propaganda model theory, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier Mail* were beneficiaries of favoured treatment by their source; the government gave them the story on an initially exclusive basis. As the thesis has demonstrated, these newspapers replicated the Minister's focus on the dole cruisers and emphasised the truth and validity of the cruiser research.

In contrast, *The Age* departed significantly from the cruiser-focussed frame by leading its report with a reference to the research findings relating to more than half of the survey population. In doing so, the newspaper effectively sought to recast the policy problem as involving a majority of all job seekers rather than a minority who deserved punitive attention.

Further, where the majority of the sample drew on the same welfare crackdown lexicon used by the Minister's statement, *The Age* in particular employed aspects of a different terminology that operated to withhold endorsement of the government position. This was also the case to a lesser degree in other reporting, notably that of the *Townsville Bulletin*;

it drew on generic terminology but also presented a polemical critique of the government statement.

To this extent, a small minority of the sample could not be said to operating as manufacturers of consent or promoters of economic, social or political agendas favoured by dominant and privileged groups including, in this case, the government.

These few newspapers operated with a significant degree of independence from the welfare discourse that was, in effect, replicated on the government's behalf by the polar opposites of the sceptical media – that is, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Courier Mail* in particular, and the bulk of the remaining newspapers in the sample that effectively, and uncritically, presented the dole cruiser story as the latest episode in a serial story about government welfare crackdowns on dole bludgers and welfare cheats.

Evidence for that assertion can be found in what the majority of the newspapers do and fail to do in the cruiser story. Their sources are few and involve highly developed and institutional relationships. These sources include the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister, his Opposition counterparts, and welfare advocates. The Minister's voice is dominant in that information presented by him is privileged in a majority of the reporting sample. With the exception of *The Age* – which quoted three unemployed people on their experiences on the dole – the *Townsville Bulletin's* reporting of critical comments by a local representative of the unemployed – and the *Sunday Mail's* account of an individual

jobseeker's assertion of his own dignity and attack on the government's motives – other voices are absent from the debate.

This corresponds with Pieper's findings in the US welfare discourse context, that '(P)oliticians and government officials on average were more likely than any group to be used as sources. Social scientists were cited infrequently in stories on welfare...' (2008, p 15).

Throughout the dole cruiser sample, there are no social scientists or statisticians who might have been called on to scrutinise the research methodology, draw inferences about its implications or comment on its substantive claims. Representatives of non-government welfare rights centres that specialise in social security law and its administration are absent from the reporting. Economic and labour market contexts are also largely absent from the reporting; where present they are given low priority in the hierarchies of relevance and emphasis of story structure. Most of the reporting appears to be founded on acceptance of the proposition that the unemployed should look for work even where it does not exist; further, that they are the primary causes and agents of their own fate.

The short-lived story of the dole cruisers was told against a background of undeclared and intersecting interests. A private sector for-profit company secured a public sector commission on the basis of a research proposal based on social marketing principles and a methodology that, at best, lacked sound empirical foundations. Internal government

discussion of provisional research findings promoted them to the political and administrative leadership as worthy and useful but also included implicit acknowledgement that there was still no evidence to support assertions about significant causal links between job seeker attitudes and job success. Notwithstanding this, the government selectively released certain findings to support a new round of punitive (and possibly predetermined) administrative action against unemployed people. This occurred within a week of a federal budget announcement about an extension of the government's Mutual Obligation job search requirements and new policy approaches to people on disability benefits.

As noted, the government's claim was based on invalid data, because the research findings did not exclude that part of the population of survey respondents who were exempt from job search requirements and therefore beyond the scope of the government's attack.

To that extent, the Minister's claim that one in six job seekers was a dole cruiser who deserved to be called a dole bludger was untrue.

The news media, however, did not identify this fundamental flaw in the government's claims. On the basis of the content of the sample reporting, even the more sceptical publications appear not to have questioned the basis of the government's claims. Specifically, how did the government arrive at its assertion that 16 per cent of job seekers were dole bludgers? Was the methodology valid? What was the evidence to support the

proposition that a person's attitude could be a highly significant or even paramount factor in whether or not they found employment?

The dominant mode of reporting was validation and endorsement of the cruiser claims, even though the reporting to varying degrees also presented criticisms of the government's statement and policy plans. However, journalists framed this aspect of the cruiser discourse as a feature of the recurring debate and rhetorical contest played out between political sources and other insiders with specialist knowledge and authority. Thus the cruiser story occurred in a frame of polarity, where Government spoke and asserted and Opposition replied and sought to counter the assertions. The reporting reflected and was a product of a genre approach to welfare topics.

In addition, very few welfare advocates were given voices within the cruiser story. As Pieper noted in the US context, the media discourse had no room for independent scrutiny of the government's claims, resting as they did on ideological assumptions about the relationship between individualism and individual merit and social and economic success. In crude terms, the government preferred to present the welfare/unemployment discourse in terms of performers and non-performers rather than winners and losers in the labour marketplace. For the most part, this ideological stance was one that the dole cruiser journalism reinforced and did not challenge. Indeed, with some exceptions – again, in *The Age* and the *Canberra Times* – the journalism not only did not challenge or question the cruiser story but also appeared to see no reason to do so.

It could be inferred from the original Brough media release that the government's policy of mutual obligation and associated sanctions was failing or flawed, because 100,000 indolent jobless people were allegedly untroubled by it. As demonstrated in this thesis, the government had repeatedly emphasised and promoted the notion that the integrity of the welfare system depended upon the identification of welfare fraud and the imposition of job search requirements on all recipients of unemployment benefits.

How then had 100,000 dole cruisers apparently succeeded in continuously evading the policy and administrative controls exercised by vigilant authorities? Why was this question absent – explicitly or implicitly – from news media coverage of the Brough release. Only one journalist, *The Australian's* National Affairs editor, raised the issue – not in the news pages but in an opinion column – three days after the appearance of the first dole cruiser reporting:

The big question is how they [cruisers] get away with it: the Government has been intent for years on making life on the dole one big hassle, with people required to jump through increasing numbers of hoops in the name of actively pursuing work. Could it be, despite the Government's propaganda, that there are not that many jobs available? Yes, says the Australian Bureau of Statistics: in February there were 87,500 job vacancies and 652,500 unemployed. That is 7.5 people for every job available. Brough-beating people to get motivated and take a job is fine in theory but if it means someone else in the queue missing out, what has been achieved? (Steketee, p 11)

The questions posed by Steketee raised issues not just for governments but also for the news media that regularly reports on aspects of economic life including the rate of unemployment. The evidence collected for this analysis suggests that a majority of the press adhered to an ideological model in which the unemployed are the cause of their own misfortune and require government intervention to move them in the right direction.

In line with van Dijk's analysis, most of the sample newspapers presented a stereotypical and consensual model of a welfare category in which dole bludgers, rorters and cheats predominate.

Even those few newspapers that provided limited space for critical voices and reported in ways that suggested a degree of scepticism did so within the constraints of the model. Under this model, the government is a disciplinarian acting in the interests of the virtuous majority of Australians. If many of that majority also believe that government is responsible for dealing with unemployment, then the media serves the interests of government (and by extension business) by emphasising the alleged absence of a work ethic on the part of a section of the community over the absence of opportunities for work.

This thesis and its central case study have demonstrated failings in media practice and cast some light on what can be characterised as a symbiotic relationship between media and its institutional sources in politics. In particular, the thesis has demonstrated the government's use of techniques to manipulate the presentation of information, including the selective release of the information to specific media outlets ahead of a general release, and the initial withholding of evidence relied upon by government to support its assertions.

If, as Steketee suggests, the government is a propagandist, then the thesis raises questions for further research regarding journalistic ideology and practice in relation to sources of news production and how journalism might better respond to propaganda. In particular it may be fruitful to apply the techniques of this thesis to a detailed examination of media processes of production in relation to future examples of welfare discourse in Australia.

Specifically, although an attitudinal segmentation of Australian journalism may not be applicable or even valid, detailed scrutiny and consideration of the experiences of journalists could be useful, particularly in relation to the strengthening of a journalistic ideology founded on a genuine scepticism that better informs journalistic practice.

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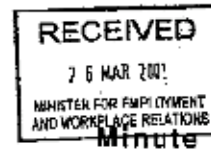
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Appendices

Appendix A: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Labour Market
Policy Group, briefing report to Minister for Employment Services 22 March 2002



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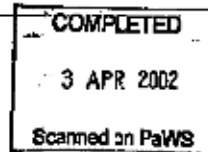
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Date: 22/03/2002

Minister for Employment Services

cc Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
For Information

Subject: Attitudinal Segmentation of Job Seekers



Purpose

To provide you with the report on research undertaken to date to develop an Australian model of attitudinal segmentation of job seekers.

Background

2. It is widely recognised that job seekers' attitudes to job search can have a major impact on their success in finding work. Despite this, relatively little attention has been paid in the past to exploring, in any formal way, the impact of attitudes on job search success. Minister Abbott has sought some research on these issues in the past and this report follows on from initial work reported on attitudes of Intensive Assistance participants.
3. The department has commissioned research from Colmar Brunton to develop an attitudinal segmentation of job seekers.
4. This (initial) stage of the research aims to identify, describe and explain the conceptual model and quantification of the job seeker segments.
 - In the short-term, it is expected that the research will provide valuable information to assist the department and service providers to understand better the needs of different job seekers, and target assistance more effectively.
 - In the longer term, research to track the relative size of the segments over time should contribute to the evaluation of the impact of government assistance and, combined with employment outcomes data, assist in the development and refinement of employment policy.
 - As well, longitudinal research to track the movement of job seekers between segments will examine the impact of different interventions and experiences on job seeker attitudes

Research findings

4. A report on the research undertaken to date is attached (Attachment A). The report outlines the methodology and findings of the research. It identifies eight job seeker segments based on the two key dimensions of 'level of motivation' and 'level of limitation' (or openness) towards the type of job and type of job search activities that are acceptable to them.

Relative levels of confidence and activity also impact on the segmentation, though to a lesser degree.

5. The job seeker segments identified by the research are:

Drivers - highly motivated and open to all job opportunities;

Struggling job seekers - highly motivated and open, but less confident about their abilities;

Drifting job seekers - want a job but are not sure what job they want or how to look for work;

- *Disempowered* job seekers - want to work but have lost all confidence in themselves and their skills, they believe they've reached their 'use-by-date';
- *Selectives* - highly motivated but place specific limits on the type of job they will accept;
- *Dependents* - limited in the types of jobs they will consider. They are motivated to find a job but are losing confidence about finding the 'right' job;
- *Cruising* job seekers - relaxed about being unemployed, do not want work in a full-time or permanent job and are not looking for regular work, although they may supplement their income with part-time or casual work; and,
- *Withdrawn* job seekers - not motivated to look for work and believe they are not able to work, often because of a medical or psychological condition.

6. Data on attitudes were collected in a survey of job seekers using a series of statements developed by the consultant. Job seekers were asked their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements, using a ten-point scale. The statements differentiate job seekers on the basis of their relative levels of motivation, limitation (openness), confidence and activity. The data were analysed to produce a segmentation model that can be replicated at any point in time.

7. Quantification of the segmentation model shows that *Drivers* (highly motivated and open to all job opportunities) and *Cruisers* (do not want full-time or permanent work and are not looking for work, though they may be doing some work) account for the largest groups of the job seeker population (16% each). *Selectives* (highly motivated but limited in the jobs they will accept) account for only 7% of the job seeker population.

8. The size of the *Cruiser* segment is of concern, as is the number of job seekers who appear to have given up hope of ever working again (*Disempowered and Withdrawn*). One of the aims of the research is to assist the identification and development of policy and communication strategies which can help to translate such job seekers into other segments to strengthen their prospects of employment.

Future Directions

9. This research is a 'work in progress'. Work is currently being undertaken to complete an analysis of the segmentation data to examine a range of issues such as the nature of the population of each job seeker segment.

- Some analysis of the segmentation of Intensive Assistance clients has already been undertaken for the Job Network Stage 3 Evaluation report.

10. Further research to be initiated shortly includes a longitudinal survey of job seekers to examine if and how job seekers move from segment to segment, how various experiences impact on this movement, and how attitudes impact on success in the labour market.

Recommendation

11. For your information.

22 March 2002

2/4/02

Noted

ATTACHMENT:
Attitudinal Segmentation of Job Seekers

Advice rating	1	2	3	4	5	Comments
Timeliness			/			
Presentation			/			
Quality of advice			/			
<small>Poor Satisfactory Excellent</small>						
Output group:						

Appendix B: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Labour Market
Policy Group, briefing report to Minister for Employment Services 16 April 2002



MINISTER'S COPY



F&G reference no: MBP 200223041

Action required before: / /

Minister for Employment Services

cc Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations

For Information

Subject: Draft Attitudinal Segmentation Report

Purpose

This report examines the nature of the population in each of the attitudinal segments and explores the extent to which various segments use the facilities provided in Centrelink offices. The report is currently being finalised and detailed briefing will be prepared for you over the next week. We also propose to draw out the full implications for service delivery, in consultation with Centrelink and NESAs, over the next month or so.

Background

2. We have previously provided you with a *qualitative* report on this research which outlined the nature of the methodological approach used to develop the model (see MBP2002 01198), and dot points requested by [redacted] in your Office, as background for a possible 'op ed' article or speech material (see Attachment A). A copy of the draft *quantitative* report is at Attachment B.

Issues

3. This research has importance, not only in shedding light on the heterogeneous attitude segments of the job seeker population, but also by giving insights into the most effective forms of service intervention. NESAs have expressed strong interest in the research, recognising its potential value in practice improvement by providers aimed at individualising service delivery through targeting motivation and support strategies to job seekers. They have indicated a readiness to participate in piloting the segmentation tool and exploring its application in a service delivery context.

4. The findings provide information on the incidence of low commitment job seekers and therefore supports the relevance of greater activation (including through Mutual Obligation and Work for the Dole) and work first approaches. Attitudes clearly matter; job seekers are not a homogenous group; and providers need to tailor their interventions – especially to address those job seekers who are too selective or lowly motivated, or who have so adapted to unemployment that they show minimal commitment to searching for sustained employment.

- As noted in Attachment A, this latter phenomenon is not peculiar to the Australian labour market, as overseas research indicates that significant minorities amongst the unemployed

population may have low employment commitment. We propose to elaborate on this research in setting the context for the final version of the report.

6. Further complementary work is in train on employer attitudes, needs and behaviours in relation to recruitment, including how they view job seekers and the assistance they look for from an employment agency.

7. As the research is progressively brought together and finalised, with links to earlier work recently released (eg the *Job Matching Stepping Stones* report), it should provide a very valuable underpinning for the Government's approach to labour market interventions and the promotion of better practice within the Job Network. NESAs has requested that this be something that is covered in the Agenda of the forthcoming NESAs Conference.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that you note:

- the contents of this Minute;
- that a forthcoming briefing will give detailed analysis of the quantitative Attitudinal Segmentation report, once it is finalised; and

Noted

MAL:BRU/GCH

Advice rating	1	2	3	4	5	Comments
Timeliness						
Presentation						
Quality of advice						
	Poor		Satisfactory		Excellent	

Attachments:

- A: Speaking points on Attitudinal Segmentation research
- B: Draft qualitative report on Attitudinal Segmentation of Job Seekers

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Appendix C

Media Release

Minister Mal Brough

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

20/05/2002 05302

Brough To Target “Cruising” Dole Recipients

The Howard Government is set to disrupt the lifestyle of 'cruising' dole recipients, who enjoy being unemployed and have no intention of genuinely seeking work.

Employment Services Minister, Mal Brough, said research commissioned by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) indicated that as many as one in six 'job seekers' were not really seeking jobs at all.

'These people are content to collect a benefit from the Australian taxpayer and feel that work would have a negative impact on their quality of life and free time,' Mr Brough said.

'They give genuine job seekers a bad name and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers.'

Mr Brough said research commissioned by his department has developed a model which identified eight categories of job seekers, based on their attitudes towards work and the search for work.

'These categories (list attached) range from highly motivated, accept-anything job seekers to those who choose unemployment as a lifestyle.

'What really upsets the Australian people is that there is a segment of job seekers - about 16 per cent - who are described as 'cruising' job seekers. That is, they are relaxed about being unemployed, do not want to work full-time, although they may supplement their income with part-time or casual work.

'There has always been a certain amount of anecdotal evidence about the existence of these 'cruisers'; however, this is the first genuine research that I am aware of that confirms the existence of a substantial body of non-performers in Australia.'

Mr Brough said examples from the one-on-one interviews undertaken during the research phase clearly illustrated the type of attitude he was talking about.

Jarrold (not his real name) is happy living on unemployment and supplements his income by playing musical gigs in pubs and busking. He enjoys the lifestyle of being

unemployed and the freedom to read and write, and spend time with his friends and girlfriend. (Full extract attached)

David (not his real name) is 26 years old and has been unemployed off and on for the last 3 years ... He enjoys the unemployed lifestyle because it allows him to be the master of his own time and gives him freedom to do other things. (Full extract attached)

'The unemployment benefit is there for those who genuinely can't find work, and are prepared to make an effort to get into employment. It is not to support those people who are content to collect a publicly funded benefit and indulge in a full-time or part-time vacation at taxpayers' expense,' Mr Brough said.

Mr Brough wants his department to identify 'cruising' dole recipients and make their lifestyle less attractive.

'If these so-called 'cruisers' think the Howard Government is going to allow them to take advantage of the generosity of the Australian taxpayer to fund their lifestyle choice, they have another thing coming,' Mr Brough said.

'If this particular group of people feels relaxed about being unemployed, I intend to make them feel a lot less comfortable and far more active.'

Mr Brough said a range of Government initiatives from Tuesday's Budget and the Australians Working Together package announced last year would broaden and intensify the participation and activity requirements of job seekers.

'Genuine job seekers will have no problem with the level of engagement involved. It is these 'cruisers' who will find it an embuggerance.'

Cruising job seekers (Research interview vignettes)

Jarrold, not his real name - (highly qualified, confident, not seriously looking but would work if got 'the job', enjoys lifestyle aspects of being unemployed)

Jarrold is 34 years old and tertiary educated. He has returned from spending many years travelling overseas, taking casual labourer jobs to get by. He is now only interested in applying for 'nice jobs' that better match his qualifications, motivations and interests. He has an interview lined up which he feels relatively confident about. Jarrold feels compelled by the requirements of Centrelink to provide evidence of job searching and does so selectively. He enjoys writing application letters; however, Jarrold does not mind if he does not get a job. He is confident and self-assured, and does not feel that he needs a job for self-esteem, or that employment equates with happiness. 'In society, if you're not working, you're considered worthless and to be not contributing any value. You're just bludging off the system. I don't believe this. I contribute in lots of other positive ways.'

Jarrold is currently writing the memoirs of his travels and considers this to be his job. He tried applying to Centrelink and other government agencies for a grant to allow him to try writing as a career but was not successful. Jarrold is happy living on unemployment and supplements his income by playing musical gigs in pubs and busking. He enjoys the lifestyle of being unemployed and the freedom to read and write, and spend time with his friends and girlfriend.

Jarrold believes that the Job Network Providers are not doing their job and that the current services are of little help for someone with his skills and qualifications. Jarrold wants a service that treats him as the client rather than a number and provides proactive services, which he feels the professional recruitment agencies deliver.

David, not his real name - (enjoys the lifestyle and freedom. Has confidence in his abilities but is not interested in working)

David is 26 years old and has been unemployed off and on for the last 3 years. David had a difficult childhood and has been living and supporting himself since he was 14 years old. He enjoys the unemployed lifestyle because it allows him to be the master of his own time and gives him freedom to do other things. However, the money he gets is barely enough to survive on and so he supplements his dole payments with under-the-table casual work.

David has issues with drugs and authority, but is confident in himself and his skills and abilities. He hates being bored and often skateboards around town, sometimes dropping into cafes to see if there is any work available. David does not feel he has received any help from his Job Network Provider and feels that they should be doing more for him. The paid casual jobs that he's had have been from his own job search efforts. He strongly believes in his own abilities, although at times he feels employers can be judgmental about the way he looks.

David is unsure about what he wants to do; he believes Centrelink or his Job Network Provider should help him figure out what he wants to do and how he can do it - 'need to look at the long term solutions, rather than an 'any job quick fix'.' At present he does not want a full-time job; his ideal lifestyle would be to work in the winter and then enjoy the summer by going on unemployment benefit.

The research

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations commissioned research to develop a needs-based segmentation of job seekers, based on research previously conducted in New Zealand

The research identified eight job seeker segments, based on the dimensions of level of motivation and level of limitation (openness) towards the type of job and job search activities that are acceptable to the job seeker.

Research on predictors of unemployment suggests that underlying factors such as motivation and work attitudes are crucial to job acquisition.

Key dimensions

The two key dimensions identified in the Australian context are:

Level of motivation

Those who are motivated are actively doing everything they can to look for work, are confident they will get a job and really want to work. In contrast, job seekers at the other end of this dimension are de-motivated, they may do as much as they have to comply but lack confidence that they will ever get a job, or believe they have barriers such that they cannot work, or may have little desire to work in a permanent or full-time job as it would impact their current life style.

Level of limitation

Job seekers may place limits on the type of job they apply for or the methods of job search they will use. The limits for type of job may be in the form of occupation, hours, days of work, location and/or they may be in terms of pay/minimum wages acceptable. Limits placed may not be job-related at all but reflect willingness to attempt different types of job search activity (ie, will access newspapers or internet for vacancies, but will not cold canvass or approach employers directly).

The eight segments:

- “ Drivers, who are highly motivated and open to all job opportunities;
- “ Struggling job seekers, who are highly motivated and open, but are less confident about their abilities;
- “ Drifting job seekers, who want a job but are not sure what job they want or how to look for work;
- “ Disempowered job seekers, who want to work but have lost all confidence in themselves and their skills; they believe they’ve reached their ‘use-by-date’;

“ Selectives, who are highly motivated but place specific limits on the type of job they are looking for and will accept;

“ Dependents, who are limited in the types of jobs they will consider. They are motivated to find a job but are losing confidence about finding the ‘right’ job;

“ Cruising job seekers are relaxed about being unemployed, do not want work in a full-time or permanent job and are not looking for work; and

“ Withdrawn job seekers, who are not motivated to look for work and believe they are not able to work, often because of a medical or psychological condition.

For media inquiries, contact

Greg Jackson 0419 713 246

Radio documentary broadcast on 13 February 2005 on Radio National's Background Briefing program

Out of Work, Out of Sight

|

Unemployment is low, but 500,000 are still on the dole. Social researchers and marketers are scrutinising the psychology of people out of work to find ways to 'help people do what's in their best interests'. Meanwhile, a government report says Centrelink is too harsh in fining people who break its rules.

Transcript

This transcript was typed from a recording of the program. The ABC cannot guarantee its complete accuracy because of the possibility of mishearing and occasional difficulty in identifying speakers.

Gareth Robinson: Unemployment in Australia is at its lowest since 1976. The official national rate is about 5%, but that statistic means there are still half a million people who are on the dole and looking for work. The government wants to shift as many of these people as possible off the sidelines of society and into the field, as participants in the game, not onlookers. Hello, I'm Gareth Robinson. Today Background Briefing enters the arena of unemployment, where a vast system operates to help and hassle people back to work. Market research is being used to scrutinise the psychology of unemployment; there's talk of using the results to change the behaviour of people on the dole. In the words of one of the researchers, 'to help people do what's in their best interests.' At the same time, there's new and scathing criticism of the penalties used to punish people who've broken the mutual obligation rules enforced by Centrelink. There's a list of a

dozen or so things any unemployed person must do regularly in order to get a welfare payment. If you break the rules, you can be fined and your dole reduced, or stopped. At its highest point, three or so years ago, 38,000 people were found in breach in just one month. □□The government set up a Breaching Review Taskforce, chaired by one of its former senior public servants. The report was given to the government in December, and Background Briefing has obtained a copy. Here's a reading.

The current penalties are generally unfair in that they are harsher than is reasonably required and can impose significant hardship, and reduce the chances of effective re-engagement, with the result that the risk of incurring further breaches is increased.

Gareth Robinson: The report says the penalties are meant to be both a deterrent and a way to maintain public support for unemployment payments. But, the report says, it's become a crime and punishment approach to people on the dole.

In the current system, people can be fined if they can't pass an activity test, designed to show they're always looking for work. They have to declare all income from any casual or part-time job, and they must turn up for activities like Work for the Dole, or again, they risk having their dole reduced.

The report says the punishment hits some people more than others, and the effect is counterproductive.

Groups of income support recipients of particular concern include young job seekers, Indigenous job seekers and job seekers with mental health problems, who incur a disproportionate number of breaches.

Gareth Robinson: The report says that reducing an unemployed person's dole payment, so making them poorer, less able to move about and more dispirited, is counterproductive because it has the opposite of the intended effect: it makes it all the harder for them to look for work.

This breaching inquiry was chaired by retired senior public servant, Tony Blunn. His report states that certain groups of very vulnerable unemployed are particularly hurt by the harsh Centrelink penalties, and mentions the young and Indigenous people, and those with mental health problems. And it says, these groups are more likely to be hit with multiple penalties.

Jobs Australia is the peak association for 260 not-for-profit groups that help people find work. The head of Jobs Australia, David Thompson, somewhat jetlagged after a flight back from overseas, is speaking here from his home in Melbourne.

David Thompson: There's very widespread and consistent reporting of levels of people with mental health issues across the whole system. "Long periods of unemployment actually both cause and exacerbate mental health issues. ...one in ten people on income support have a mental health issue." Part of the problem is that long periods of unemployment actually both cause and exacerbate mental health issues. There is some research that suggests, from memory, something like one in ten people on income support have a mental health issue. What we really need to do is to identify those people and get them the sort of assistance they need to resolve those issues.

Gareth Robinson: David Thompson says continually forcing some people to look for work won't overcome the very things that prevent them finding it.

David Thompson: If you've applied for a thousand jobs over, say, a two or three year period and haven't been able to get one, because you've got some mental health issues or because you need re-training or all sorts of other things, then you're actually going to have to help people get more motivated, help people resolve their health issues, help people do the other things that are going to actually reduce those barriers, rather than pretending they're not there.

Gareth Robinson: Members of David Thompson's association, Jobs Australia, work in

the same system as private companies. They all get government contracts to help people find work, and to police compliance with the rules.

Any person who breaches the rules must be reported to Centrelink. A member of the Breaching Review Taskforce spoke to Background Briefing, on the condition that no name is used. Background Briefing was told there was an unstated policy in Centrelink to breach early, and often. Frequently people were found in breach without any attempt to test the evidence.

But things have changed. From the highest point in 2001, when 38,000 people were penalised in one month, the numbers have recently dropped to fewer than 10,000 a month.

The Blunn Report says Centrelink is taking care to justify penalties and has tightened up its own administration, but adds that the penalties are still too harsh and the effects counterproductive. Again, an edited reading from the leaked report.

Some people are more susceptible to being breached through no fault of their own. Poor local labour market conditions in some areas can impact on a person's capacity to comply with their participation requirements. A significant number of breaches arise from people's poor understanding of their obligations.

Gareth Robinson: There are places around Australia that buck the national trend of falling unemployment. Take a drive through Wollongong, past the steelworks where 20,000 people used to work. That was in the '80s. Fewer than 7,000 people work there now.

Just over the hill, south of the blast furnaces and the smokestacks, you'll find the suburb of Warrawong. Its northern boundary is marked by a roadside pole, with a sign and a slogan: 'Warrawong – it's more than you think.'

The slogan isn't misleading. There are hillside homes with million dollar views of Lake

Illawarra and a retail strip chock full of brand names: Freedom and Fantastic Furniture, Car Lovers and KFC, Barbecues Galore, Babies Galore and Harvey Norman.

Warrawong has a Westfield shopping centre and an unemployment rate of 20%. There are three public housing estates dating from the 1970s. More than half of the occupants are single and there's a minority of sole parents. Warrawong also has a community centre that's doing a roaring trade in free lunches for people down on their luck.

Rod: My name's Rod. I've been unemployed for about 18 months and I come down here to the Warrawong community kitchen for a feed every now and then when I need to, and I volunteer here on Wednesdays. And I'm going to TAFE two days a week to try to get some qualifications.

Gareth Robinson: An average of 50 people a day turn up for lunch at the centre. Many are from the local public housing estates, some are homeless, and all are on welfare.

Like a few others, Rod puts in time there as a volunteer to comply with the Centrelink rules. His TAFE course means he's got light at the end of his personal tunnel, but he's not impressed by the way the system runs him around.

Rod: Oh look, it's insane. I mean like I say, I'm doing two days a week at TAFE, I'm doing two days a week Work for the Dole compulsorily, obligatorily, and I'm volunteering here one day a week. Now they still wanted me to do the Work for the Dole, so now that's five days a week that I'm busy, and yet I've still got to put in four job applications a fortnight that I've gone for. And you know, that's quite difficult really.

Gareth Robinson: What happened in the last fortnight? Were you able to find the four and put them in?

Rod: Well yes, I did, you know, without giving too much away, I found a couple of them in the phone book.

Gareth Robinson: Getting the names of employers out of the phone book is one way to keep on side with Centrelink. There's no actual job vacancy, but you tell Centrelink you were looking.

Some people in Warrawong will comply with the job search rules by asking Maxyne Graham if there's any work going in the office from which she runs the community centre.

Maxyne Graham: A typical day here. Well, we provide a community lunch four days a week now, and that may lose funding in May. It's where people can come and have a nutritional meal because some of them don't eat; people will come in, they may need to get into rehab, they've been using drugs for a long time, they've had enough, they've got no money, they might have criminal charges that are on the verge of going to jail, so they've decided they want to get clean. I'll ring and try to get them into rehab detox services. There could be mental health issues. I'll ring the mental health team. There's suicide attempts, there's people having episodes, you know, disorientation, don't know what they're doing. There's assaults out the front, so I might have to call the police.

Gareth Robinson: You get into the centre through a foyer lined with posters and brochures, a mosaic of sources of help. The immediate neighbours are the local legal centre on one side, and the Barnados charity on the other. Next door again, there used to be a funeral parlour, but they've moved to a better location in Warrawong's main street.

Maxyne Graham: People are behind in their electricity bills, or their rent, or something; they need food, they're not eating, so they'll come in here looking for food, they'll come in here looking for me to advocate on their behalf through Centrelink, through Integral, to get extensions on their electricity bills. "People get angry, they've got no money, they've got bills to pay and they just lose it." They could be breached from Centrelink for not turning up at interviews, well then I'll ring on their behalf because they've got angry and went off at the staff at Centrelink, and Centrelink's thrown them out, and all sorts of

things. But when I speak to Centrelink, Centrelink staff seem to be a little bit more friendly with me if I advocate on someone's behalf, because it is just frustration. People get angry, they've got no money, they've got bills to pay and they just lose it.

Gareth Robinson: Losing it can also get you in trouble at Warrawong's main shopping centre. There are security guards and surveillance cameras, and people can get thrown out for anti-social behaviour. In common with other shopping centres, some people also get banned for shoplifting. At Warrawong though, a ban can have extra consequences because the local Centrelink shopfront is deep inside the centre.

Maxyne Graham: Quite a few people over at Westfield who've been banned from there for shoplifting, shoplift food. Not all of them shoplift to sell, and they pick up cigarette butts and all that, they get thrown out for that too, but they don't get banned for that. It's just really difficult for them.

Gareth Robinson: What happens if they do get banned? Isn't there a Centrelink inside that centre?

Maxyne Graham: That's right. So if they have to access Centrelink and they don't know that we've got an agreement with them, that I can ring up security on their behalf and security will allow them if I ring first, to go through Hoyts, which is the outside, up the stairs, straight to Centrelink, and then back out. They're not allowed through the shops. A lot of people don't know about that agreement though, and as soon as they walk in to go to Centrelink, they say, 'Tough, you can't come in.' They're not allowed to use the grocery stores either, so if they have got money to buy food, well they've got to go to Wollongong, Dapto or Berkley. Also doctors, they can't access the doctors over there because they're in Westfield. When they're banned, they're banned from Westfield, the doctors, the x-ray place, the dentist, not that they can afford the dentist anyway, Bunnings, the bowling alley and McDonalds.

Gareth Robinson: It has to be said that Maxyne's clients aren't always the victims. In the

public housing opposite her centre, she says there's plenty of victimising going on as well.

Maxyne Graham: There's a lot of break-and-enters, harassment, intimidation, standover tactics. There's quite a few addicts that live over there, and alcoholics, they don't get on. Alcoholics think that addicts are the scum of the earth and it's all addiction, it's all an illness, so it doesn't matter what you take. Quite a few squatters over there, and they harass people for money. The Department of Housing bed-sits are not a very nice place to live. They're old, the carpet's disgusting, the kitchens are disgusting, and the walls have got holes in them, there's no screen doors where they can let fresh air in, there's only one door they can get in and out. And they're atrocious. And okay, they pay low rents, but so what? You know, they're hovels.

Gareth Robinson: One of the other volunteers at Maxyne's centre is a man called Mark. In the public housing hierarchy, he's a little better off, living near the bed-sits but in a block of bigger units. His strategy is to keep to himself. He's been unemployed for six years.

Mark: Well my profession is I'm an assistant nurse. I've done hospitality for three years, I'm a volunteer. What else have I done? Car washing, laundry hand, fruit picking; I've been halfway around Australia fruit picking and travelling, and just looking for work. So what more do I have to do? Years ago when I was 14, 15, I could just walk off the street into a job, and they'd teach you something, but now they haven't got time or they don't have the money or patience. Now you've got to know what you're doing. Even if you go into a kitchen; I've worked in kitchens and cooking, I've got to have a certificate to say I can wash up, and that's pretty stupid. Even here I've got to have health and hygiene, safety, I've got to have a police record check for working with kids, first aid, so I've got to have all those just to get a job. Years ago you didn't, but it's all changed now.

Gareth Robinson: Mark's weekly routine revolves around his voluntary work in the community kitchen. The work means he's complying with the Centrelink requirements,

so they leave him alone. When Background Briefing spoke to Mark, he was on duty with the tea and coffee.

Mark: I've got to do 32 hours a week here because I wanted to. They leave you alone once you're doing this, and you just put a form in every 12 weeks. Apart from that they just leave me alone and they just pay me. I know that every fortnight the pay's going in, the rent's paid, electricity and the gas is paid. My loan's being paid off, I do my shopping and I've probably got 50 bucks to myself for a fortnight, and that's it, I've got nothing left. And it doesn't last long. A lot of people are in worse situations than me. I'm lucky I don't have a drug problem at the moment, and I don't have an alcohol problem because I've slowed that right back. My boss still worries about it though.

Gareth Robinson: Your boss being Maxyne here at the centre?

Mark: Yes, Maxyne or Delma is my boss.

Gareth Robinson: Mark is 46. He did some time in jail but that's behind him. He has stable voluntary work, for as long as the kitchen's government funding continues, and he survives on the dole payment the system calls Newstart. Not that he sees anything bright in his future.

Mark: Not unless something comes along where they're going to say, yeah, what's your qualifications? Oh, you haven't got any? I don't think so. No, I can see me going from the dole straight onto the pension and just living up there where I am, and maybe the Housing Commission will move me in ten years, which they said they might, and I'm just going to plod along, plod along, plod along. That's it.

Gareth Robinson: In Australia, unemployment was low until the late '60s. Then jobs got harder to get. There were various official responses, including a new concern that some people were choosing an easy life on the dole. This concern translated into attempts to categorise people according to whether they deserved income support. In the early 1970s,

staff at the Department of Social Security were being told to watch out for certain people. Here's a reading from official staff instructions at the time.

The need to ensure that a claimant is genuinely looking for work applies especially to: members of hippy colonies, members of the 'surfie' element, and new arrivals in the area whose apparent purpose is, for example, holidays, tourism, or even the organisation of and participation in public protest demonstrations. Unemployment benefit is not ordinarily to be granted to young single persons who come within any of the above categories.

Gareth Robinson: In effect, there were two kinds of unemployed people: the dole bludgers and the job seekers. All governments since have talked about unemployment in this way.

At the same time, however, the current government has sought a more sophisticated understanding of unemployment. It's been using psychological and market research techniques to look at people's attitudes and motivation.

It hasn't all gone smoothly. Some initial results were released about three years ago, and the then Minister, Mal Brough, came out blasting with what he said was the first genuine research to actually count dole bludgers. He said one in six people were enjoying life on welfare, and he wanted to get them moving.

Mal Brough: There will be a lot more activity required by both the job network members and hence the unemployed, so there'll be no rest, if you like, it's activity, activity, activity, and we know that leads to jobs and it also messes around these people who say No, I just like the lifestyle of being unemployed.

Gareth Robinson: The Minister, however, got the figures wrong. His claim was based on interviews with 3,500 job seekers, but while they all were registered as unemployed, they weren't all on the dole. In fact, hundreds of them were sole parents and disability

pensioners and at the time they weren't covered by mutual obligation.

Later Mr Brough's department did more research and came up with a new, lower number of dole bludgers. There was no media release about this lower figure.

The market research effort continued to scrutinise the thoughts and motivations of the unemployed.

I am going to read you out a list of things that other people have said about looking for a job. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements using a number between one and ten.

1. You already know how to look for a job.
2. You do not know what sort of job you want.
3. You would rather be unemployed than take a job you don't like.
4. You do more than the average unemployed person to try and find work.
5. You don't think you should have to do paid work at the moment.

Gareth Robinson: These statements were used in telephone interviews with unemployed people around Australia. The results were used to count and classify the entire unemployed population.

In one report, government officials noted that the findings supported some stereotypes, but not others. Older job seekers, for example, were found to be more likely to feel that they'd lost any chance of getting work. It's not surprising that they were resigned to living on the dole. But the enduring image of dole bludgers being young, male and unruly, didn't stand up. The people in this category were found to be just as likely to be female as male, and older as well as younger.

Background Briefing used freedom of information laws to obtain ministerial briefing notes on this research. You can read them [here](#).

This work on the psychology of unemployment actually started ten years ago, in New Zealand. The government there hired market researchers Colmar Brunton to scrutinise unemployed New Zealanders.

Some of the work involved the national employment service's former marketing manager, Jude Urlich. She's on the phone from her new office at Victoria University in Wellington. She recalls the goal of the research as being to classify people in what marketing experts call a segmentation.

Jude Urlich: The segmentation looked at two key attributes: how active people were in terms of looking for work, and how confident they were. So if you can imagine two axes like a cross, and one's got 'confident' at the top and one's got 'not confident' at the bottom, and 'actively seeking' on one side, and 'not actively seeking' on the other. And what they found was roughly about half of all people were quite confident, and nearly half were actively seeking work, so it was reasonably evenly spread. But where people were positioned within that was quite interesting. "Contrary to popular myth, only about 6% of people are actually enjoying the unemployed lifestyle." We found that contrary to popular myth, only about 6% of people are actually enjoying the unemployed lifestyle, they're cruising. So they're not actively seeking work and they're kind of ambivalent, they're sort of not over-confident, they don't lack confidence, they're just happy where they are. There's only 6%.

Gareth Robinson: So the New Zealanders were surprised that there were fewer dole bludgers than people expected, just 6%. Surprising too, was the number of people who said they had no hope of ever getting a job, even though they'd like one. One in every four unemployed New Zealanders was deemed to be in this category, called the withdrawn jobless. Again, Jude Urlich.

Jude Urlich: They weren't in that category because of a lack of willingness, they were suffering. And so you can imagine, you don't take to that group with a stick and force them to be confident, you have to develop strategies to bring them up and to encourage

that job-seeking activity. They're quite a different group from your cruisers.

Gareth Robinson: Different again were the sizeable group of people who were identified as wanting work, but only on their own terms. The problem, in Jude Urlich's view, was that the terms might not match with the realities of the job market.

Jude Urlich: It is fair to say that people's expectations can be a barrier. This research is all about working out barriers and motivations, to become job-ready. We found we had 20% of people who were very confident and actively seeking work, but they only wanted the job, not a job; they were picky. So if you've got 20% of your job seekers thinking that there's something better for them out there, the strategy is not going to be hitting them with a stick, the strategy's got to be about getting a wee bit of reality in there. So there are a lot of people with unrealistic expectations in relation to their local labour market.

Gareth Robinson: In New Zealand, the results of the research were used to make motivational advertisements for radio and TV. Here's an example.

Stirring music

Man: I've worked hard all my life, and that's the only way we're going to get anywhere.

Woman: It's through work that our economy changes and grows.

Man: Everyone in New Zealand has something to contribute.

Man: It's all about getting out and giving it a go.

Man: Sometimes, it looks too hard.

Woman: But if you don't do something for yourself, it doesn't get any easier.

Man: And staying on a benefit is not the answer.

Man: That's why the government is changing the benefit system.

Woman: To encourage people who can work to look for work.

Man: So that everyone can play their part.

Woman: And help our country grow.

Gareth Robinson: The effects of these ads were tested in a pilot study, with what Jude Urlich says were encouraging results. Then the government employment service was restructured and the attitudinal approach was dropped.

The research company, Colmar Brunton, also operates in Australia and it investigated Australian job seekers at the request of the government here. The company's head of social research is Joan Young. She says the investigation was based in part on an idea called social marketing.

Joan Young: What we're talking about in social marketing is applying an approach for the benefit of people, or the benefit of society. It's actually looking at how can we help people to do what will be in their best interests. I guess the issue is, are we very clear what's in their best interests, and I guess that's the more political question.

Gareth Robinson: The political nature of the issue turns on the idea of 'social engineering', something the present government has completely rejected in the past. The government has consistently said it will not tell people how to live their lives. Here's Prime Minister John Howard last September, talking about what people want from the government.

John Howard: I learnt that they want certain things from their government, but there are

some things they don't want from their government. They want their government to create a climate of stability and security and reassurance, but they don't want their governments to tell them how to live their lives. They don't want a behavioural policeman as a Prime Minister.

Gareth Robinson: The research into unemployed people is continuing, and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is preparing a new report to its Minister.

Thousands of people on the dole have been interviewed, their responses and personalities analysed. Colmar Brunton's Joan Young says the work started with detailed interviews with about 50 people. What they said was used to create the different categories.

Joan Young: We look at people's responses and we divide them into broad groups, like 'Let's put all the motivated people together and all the people who obviously haven't got that motivation together',. And now let's look at the people that will take any job if it were offered them, versus the people that are really only looking for a specific type of work or number of hours, or amount of money, before they'd accept a job. So broadly, you're categorising people into those those groups and even within them, depending on a different factor or a different sort of attitude or motivation, and that's what pulls segments apart into sub-segments.

Gareth Robinson: In the end, there were eight segments, with names like the Drivers, the most optimistic, go-ahead job seekers; and the Drifters, the Strugglers, and the Cruisers; as you'd expect, they're the ones enjoying life on the dole. You'll find the full list of categories by going to Background Briefing's website on ABC Radio National.

There is considerable scepticism about some aspects of this kind of research. One critic is Professor Tony Winefield, from the School of Psychology at the University of South Australia. One of his main research areas is the psychological effects of unemployment. He's on the phone from Adelaide.

Tony Winefield: First of all, this kind of pigeonholing assumes that people can be neatly put into one pigeonhole, whereas in fact they might show behaviours or characteristics which would make sense for them to be put into more than one pigeonhole. But I think more serious is the assumption that people can't move, that is, it assumes a static model and I think that there's probably not very good evidence to support that, and I think particularly when it comes to attitudes, people's attitudes vary all the time. They're influenced by things like mood, which in turn is influenced by time of day, whether your football team has won; there are all sorts of things that affect people's attitudes and if you simply interview them at one particular point in time, you may come up with a completely different label or category for them, than if you interviewed them at a different time.

Gareth Robinson: The Department of Employment is working on more research, to see if people do move between the categories.

The creation of the categories involved interviews with those original 50 jobless people. Joan Young says getting valid information requires highly skilled interviewers.

Joan Young: What we do to try to get the real picture about what's going on with people's minds is we have very highly trained qualitative researchers, who really devote their research careers to developing very high levels of interviewing skills. They're trained to ensure that they ask questions in an unbiased way, that they respond to people's answers in a way that doesn't send signals to the respondent about what's a good answer and what's a bad answer, that everything we ask hopefully appears to be equally important in terms of the sort of focus that we're looking for in the interview.

Gareth Robinson: The interviewers spent about two hours with each subject and used techniques from psychology, including getting people to draw pictures.

Joan Young: We use techniques for some people who find it difficult to verbally

articulate how they feel. We use drawings where people actually drew a picture about what their life would be like in five years time if they didn't have a job, compared to what their life would be like in five years time if they did have a job. "We had jobseekers that hadn't told their families that they were unemployed ...a lot of shame and guilt about unemployment." And it was extremely illuminating to see just how passionate some of the job seekers were about desperately wanting work. We had jobseekers that hadn't told their families that they were unemployed; we had some very, very sad situations, and a lot of shame and guilt about unemployment.

Gareth Robinson: Colmar Brunton suggested to the government that its job-seeker profiles could be used to assess the effect of government policies, like mutual obligation and Work for the Dole. Separately, the company said, the government could also try to influence unemployed people to change their behaviour, say by moving from the unmotivated to the motivated categories.

The research methods used by Colmar Brunton, like getting people to draw pictures, are known as projective techniques: they come from clinical psychology and are commonly used in market research.

Tony Winefield however, says there is no evidence that they work.

Tony Winefield: Projective tests are notoriously unreliable. Anyone trained in scientific psychology would agree on that. Projective tests include things like the Rorschach and the thematic apperception tests, but they are notoriously unreliable.

Gareth Robinson: Do they also include things like getting people to draw pictures?

Tony Winefield: Yes, yes. And interpreting ink blots.

Gareth Robinson: And yet I'm told that these are standard techniques in market research and now in this social marketing approach.

Tony Winefield: But what a lot of market researchers do is garbage, and what a lot of clinical psychologists do as well I'm afraid is garbage, those particularly who don't operate in accordance with the scientist practitioner model.

Gareth Robinson: And what is that model?

Tony Winefield: Well it assumes that practice is guided by scientific evidence. In medicine, it's known as evidence-based research, and there are standards of evidence, you require well-controlled studies that can demonstrate an effect using proper measuring instruments, and those sorts of techniques as far as I am aware, have never been applied to assessing the usefulness of projective tests.

Gareth Robinson: Tony Winefield, from the University of South Australia.

The profiling of job seekers has also been criticised by a Melbourne academic, and consultant, Jan Carter. She's said the reliability and validity of the initial results was weak. Nonetheless, she saw the depth of the interviews as commendable. She also called the research approach a welcome one, because it tried to see the unemployed as people, and not just statistics.

In recent months there's been another focus on behaviour and welfare, in plans for new approaches in some Indigenous communities. There've been proposals to link welfare payments or other benefits to agreed standards of behaviour, for example, in relation to children's hygiene, or school attendance. Although the government has said it will listen to the ideas of individual Indigenous communities and won't impose any general approach. Just last week, the government seemed to be shifting ground, with officials telling a Senate committee there would be a carrot-and-stick approach, but nobody would actually lose welfare payments.

This idea of associating welfare and behaviour has been criticised, partly because it's

been seen as discriminating on the basis of race.

An editorial in *The Sydney Morning Herald* said there were various difficulties with the approach, but that it could still be examined on a community-wide basis. Here's a reading from the editorial:

Tens of thousands of non-Indigenous Australians squander welfare on self-destructive lifestyles, perpetuating intergenerational despair and hopelessness. For effectiveness, as well as fairness, the same rules would need to apply to them, although it is probable the government is considering this.

Gareth Robinson: Background Briefing spoke to the present Minister for Employment, Kevin Andrews, who has recently been briefed by his department about the attitudinal research. He says he has no plans to apply the job seeker research along the lines suggested for Indigenous communities.

Kevin Andrews: Well with the Indigenous communities, we're looking at shared responsibility agreements between various levels of government and the community themselves. It's something which is largely driven by the community in terms of what they want to achieve as an outcome, and you have, if you like, within a community, a smaller, more defined society. Now that doesn't generally apply to people who are living in, for example, the major metropolitan cities of Australia; you don't have the same set of physical and community circumstances. So I think to automatically assume that you can do something which might work for an Indigenous community in the broader community, it's not as practical as that.

Gareth Robinson: As for the unemployed, the Minister says it's unfair and wrong to classify them as simply good or bad, as triers or bludgers.

Kevin Andrews: No, it's not accurate, and it's not fair to those who are unemployed. Unemployed are not one homogenous group of people, they're made up of people with

individual stories, individual backgrounds, individual motivations, different skill sets, and simply to label them as falling into some category or another doesn't really help us to find them work.

Gareth Robinson: Nonetheless, Kevin Andrews says, policy makers should take account of people's attitudes.

Kevin Andrews: Well if it helps us in order to educate the Job Network providers to better understand the people who come to them for assistance, then it's useful in terms of just their assessment of their clients. It's also useful I think, in terms of the way in which they go about providing the assistance to them. If they know that somebody is lacking in motivation for a particular reason, or set of reasons, which might differ to others, well then their approach to them can be different. "The better we understand individuals and what are the forces at work within them themselves, then the better chances we have to actually assist them." It's just like there's a range of other abilities that people have, that colour their chances. If somebody is physically disabled in some way, well then they're going to be in a different circumstance to somebody who might be suffering, say, anxiety, or depression. So it's again trying to recognise that we're not dealing with an homogenous group of people, but we're dealing with individuals, and the better we understand individuals and what are the forces at work within them themselves, then the better chances we have to actually assist them.

Gareth Robinson: For a sizeable minority of the unemployed, pushing them to continually look for work may not be the answer. Some people are crippled by mental illness, some are drug addicts or alcoholics, others don't have the social skills or education needed to find and keep a job.

In Melbourne, the Brotherhood of St Laurence runs programs to help some of these people. It also employs Stephen Ziguras to analyse social policy. He thinks the government's approach does work for plenty of job seekers, but he says, for tens of thousands of others, an endless round of compulsory job search is futile.

Stephen Ziguras: For a fairly substantial group of people, and we might be saying 20% or 30% of unemployed people, the system doesn't work. And for a few reasons: one is that certainly in the past there's been a fairly strong emphasis on requirements, obligations that people have had to do, regardless of whether they've seen that as being relevant to them. And most of the requirements have been about the number of jobs that you've got to look for, forms that you have to hand in, diaries that you've got to keep with a list of jobs that you've looked for. And so they're all things that encourage people to look for jobs directly. But if you've been looking for a job for two or three years, and the reason you haven't got it is because you don't have the right experience, or you don't have the right qualifications, then simply looking for more work isn't going to help.

Gareth Robinson: Stephen Ziguras argues that the policies that are meant to encourage people to stick with the job search system can end up pushing them out of it.

Stephen Ziguras: The assumption is that if you look for enough jobs for long enough, you're going to find one. And for many people that's true, but for a fairly sizeable minority of people, that approach is ineffective and counter-productive. And for a lot of people that really just leads them to be very frustrated and resentful. People then try and avoid anything to do with Centrelink or even the Job Network in some circumstances, because they feel that they are just being pushed to do things which are of no benefit, so people don't see the system as being useful or helpful, and really, they only engage with it to the extent that they are forced to. And that just means that they're not really being helped at all, they're just turning up for the sake of it.

Gareth Robinson: And while they're going through the motions, Stephen Ziguras says, the strength of the economy can conceal the situation of many of the unemployed.

Stephen Ziguras: Well it's true that unemployment's been coming down, although that's a bit deceptive because there's still a big group of people who are working part-time or casually, who'd like to get a full-time job, but can't get one, and they're not included in

the unemployment stats. And there's also a group of people who are what's called discouraged job seekers, people who'd like to work but effectively have given up looking. So it's certainly true that there's been a few more jobs around. The other issue is that people remaining on unemployment benefits are more likely to be those people that have got a range of barriers. So they might have a lower level of qualifications, less work experience. Often the people we see might have a combination of those, and fairly serious health problems of some sort.

Gareth Robinson: How we measure unemployment and what the numbers really mean are part of a long-running debate. One view was expressed earlier this month on the website, On Line Opinion. Here's an edited reading from a piece by Tim Martyn, who works for Jesuit Social Services in Victoria.

It's important that while celebrating the low unemployment rate, the Federal government's employment agenda keeps sight of the big picture. As Australia's full-time employees spend longer hours at work, the ranks of part-time people continue to grow. The difficulty stems from the way we measure unemployment in Australia. The Bureau of Statistics counts people as employed even if they spend as little as one hour per week working, and spend every subsequent hour actively seeking a job.

Official unemployment fell to 520,000 people in December 2004. However if we were to take into account the unemployed and underemployed currently excluded by this measure, a lack of work remains a major financial burden for 1-1/2-million Australians.

And given that there are one-million households where one or more adults work, living below the poverty line, we start to see the new phenomenon facing Australian workers: a job is no longer a guaranteed path out of poverty.

Gareth Robinson: Back at Warrawong's community centre, people keep on turning up for the daily free lunch. It may not continue for too much longer, because it relies on a New South Wales government grant that's all but eaten up. Nobody's offering new money.

In the meantime, the kitchen provides a place to volunteer, to lunch and to mingle. The centre co-ordinator Maxyne Graham, sees it as a haven for people short on just about everything else.

Maxyne Graham: They don't have living skills, they don't have budgeting skills. They've been living in this cycle of poverty for a very long time. They don't know how to get out of it. How do they get a job? They're unskilled, they haven't got the confidence to go out and look for a job. They don't get the paper every day, they haven't got a phone to ring up or for people to ring back to let them know about jobs. They haven't got money for transport; they haven't got a car, and they haven't got money to buy clothes to even look decent as is expected in society these days, to go for a job. Because once people look at you in shorts and a t-shirt, you wouldn't get the job. There's no jobs for unskilled workers, and there's that fear factor as well. If you've got an addiction, if you've got a criminal record, if you've got a mental health issue, do you tell the people that you go to for a job? 'I don't know how to do a resume'. There's no computers, there's only one job networking company here, there used to be five, they're all closed down.

Gareth Robinson: So in Warrawong, unskilled jobs are scarce and the job network agencies are too. And as Maxyne Graham points out, if people were to apply for jobs, they'd think twice about the costs of being candid. Shame and stigma are undeclared permanent features of the system. It's something that's been acknowledged in the report of the Breaching Taskforce.

Many employment service providers and Centrelink officers recognise that mental illness is an important factor in the non-compliance of a significant number of job seekers, but it is difficult to identify and respond to their needs unless the job seeker reveals their situation. Many income support recipients are reluctant to reveal any barriers because of the stigma attached.

Gareth Robinson: Maxyne Graham has her own ideas about the way to demolish these

barriers.

Maxyne Graham: I would give one-on-one intense assistance to people, and treat them as an individual, because everyone's different, everyone's got complex needs. Look at the government promoting unskilled jobs, where are they? There used to be a lot years ago, but there isn't any more, and that's why people are on the dole, because they're unskilled. "There's jobs there for people who are qualified, got experience, but what about someone who hasn't worked for ten years?" There's jobs there for people who are qualified, got experience, but what about someone who hasn't worked for ten years? Okay, they did have an addiction, they've come clean, they've tried to turn their life around. They haven't got any qualifications, they're scared to go to TAFE because they left school when they were 14, and they remember what school was like: they were always in trouble and they think that TAFE is like that as well.

Gareth Robinson: The taskforce report that's now in the government's hands is recommending change from the very top. It says one of many problems is the lack of a clear, consistent policy statement about what Centrelink's breaching system is meant to achieve.

In Melbourne, Jobs Australia Chief Executive David Thompson says the current system assumes that all job seekers need to be forced to do the right thing.

David Thompson: What I'd like to see is the ability for the system to be calibrated so that people get a set of requirements and a set of assistance that suits them and their circumstances rather than the same sort of prescription for everyone. The problem with very large systems involving very large numbers of people is it's very difficult to nuance them. But I think if we devoted more resources to assisting those people that are willing, but that have got various issues that are preventing them get jobs, rather than assuming everyone needs a high dose of compliance and activation, I think we could make the system more effective and indeed, more efficient.

Gareth Robinson: Background Briefing's Co-ordinating Producer and Technical Operator is Angus Kingston. Research, Paul Bolger. Executive Producer, Kirsten Garrett. I'm Gareth Robinson. You're with ABC Radio National.

The documents which Background Briefing obtained under under the Freedom of Information act can be found here.

Further Information

Job Seeker Attitudinal Segmentation: An Australian Model □ Report by Colmar Brunton Social Research and the Service and Quality Analysis Section, Labour Market Group, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. □ http://www.workplace.gov.au/WP/CDA/Files/WP/att_segments.pdf

Job Seeker Attitudinal Segmentation: Analysis of the Segments □ Report by the Service and Quality Analysis Section, Labour Market Policy Group, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations □ <http://www.workplace.gov.au/WP/CDA/Files/WP/quantattseg.pdf>