

Twiggy's indigenous job plan falls short

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MINING magnate Andrew Forrest's scheme to find 50,000 jobs for indigenous Australians has filled just 2800 places to date, a new report suggests.

Mr Forrest and then prime minister Kevin Rudd launched the Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) on October 30, 2008, with the goal of creating 50,000 jobs within two years.

The Fortescue Metals boss has since backed away from that ambitious target, and a report from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University reveals that's just as well.

"The AEC has not yet been able to collect accurate data on (job numbers)," the report, released on Monday, states. "However, their estimates are that around 2800 indigenous people have been placed into AEC jobs to date."

The report's authors, Kirrily Jordan and Dante Mavec, say indigenous labour force data suggest the 50,000 target was always "impossibly ambitious".

Just 22,000 indigenous jobs were created in the five years to the last census in 2006. But it's not all bad news for the AEC two years on.

The covenant works by encouraging employers to guarantee a number of jobs for indigenous Australians. Eligible job seekers then commit to take on those jobs and the federal government provides pre-employment training.

The CAEPR report notes the AEC has been "very effective" in securing job pledges. "More than 20,000 jobs have been pledged under the scheme," it states. "These jobs are spread across 135 employers and 15 industries."

There's also some evidence the scheme may be contributing to a broader trend of corporate Australia supporting indigenous employment.

But the report notes a lack of reliable data means it's impossible to tell how effective the AEC has really been - and whether taxpayers are getting value for money. So far the commonwealth has committed at least \$4 million to the scheme, including start-up funding.

"To date the AEC has not claimed outcome payments for job placements or retention because their own data on these outcomes are inadequate for this purpose," the report states. "It has received outcome payments for job pledges."

Dr Jordan and Mr Mavec argue that after two years greater public disclosure is needed.

"Until more detailed information is released about the AEC's outcomes and its agreements with government, it is not possible to assess how well taxpayer dollars are translating into sustainable jobs."

Last week, Mr Forrest launched Generation One, a public awareness campaign which aims to end indigenous inequality. It's linked to the AEC. Madeleine Madden, 13, made a two-minute speech broadcast on free-to-air television stations on Sunday night urging the nation to create job opportunities and a better future for indigenous people.