

The Journal

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Heinz staff given news of the worst kind

100 JOBS CUT

By Alice Archer

ONE hundred jobs at Dandenong's Heinz Wattie's factory have been axed. Staff, on Wednesday, were told 100 jobs at Dandenong would be scrapped and a \$10-million factory opened at Echuca.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (food and confectionery division) spokeswoman Ms Debbie Quarrel said staff at Dandenong were told they had 10 days to consider the move.

"This is the sixth round of redundan-

cies at the Dandenong factory since 1992. The staff there has been cut from almost 1000 in 1991 to 250. There is not one person at that factory now who does not believe that the company is chipping away at the staff so it can eventually close Dandenong," she said.

"On Wednesday the company announced its plans and told staff they had three options. Dandenong would lose 100 jobs and staff could either accept a redundancy package, apply for a job at Echuca or apply for a very limited number of jobs at Dandenong.

"The baby food production is moving to Echuca and Dandenong is going to specialise in baked beans and spaghetti and soup," she said.

"Why 100 jobs are to go we don't know because there were only about 60 workers in baby food. It is impossible for staff to make up their minds in 10 days. We are talking about a complete life change."

Heinz Wattie's spokeswoman, Ms Glenda Orland, said the plan was about creating "centres of excellence" and becoming more competitive.

She said the Echuca factory was only three years old and was "perfectly suited" to manufacturing baby food. It was also closer to the fruit growers.

She stressed that all redundancies would be voluntary and no-one would be forced to leave.

Asked if staff would be guaranteed a job at Echuca if they wanted one, she said: "Their skills will be assessed and if they match the skills needed to operate the Echuca plant then they will be offered a job."

Asked if the future of the Dandenong

factory could be guaranteed, she said: "We are hopeful of creating a centre of excellence at Dandenong, specialising in our biggest category, baked beans, spaghetti and soups. But it will depend on the staff agreeing to workplace reform."

On November 8 *The Journal* revealed suspicions the factory would close. It stated that Heinz Wattie's had sold some of its land on the Princes Highway at Dandenong to the Army. It had bought a factory at Echuca from Nestle and planned to relocate its baby food lines.



Aussie battler

Three-year-old Matthew Thiele is his mother Lisa's pride and joy. The battling Narre Warren youngster miraculously survived a car fire which left him in intensive care clinging to life. He is now home and on the road to recovery. His plight has touched the hearts of many locals who have offered their love and support. Story page 21.

Picture: Robert Carew

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